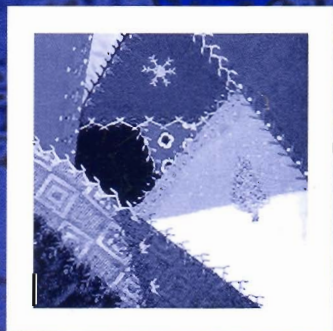


Copyrighted Material

A New Perspective
for Career Development,
Counseling, and Public Policy

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WORKING

DAVID L. BLUSTEIN



Copyright © 2006 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by photostat, microform, retrieval system, or any other means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
10 Industrial Avenue
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430
www.erlbaum.com

Cover design by Kathryn Houghtaling Lacey

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blustein, David Larry.

The psychology of working : a new perspective for career development, counseling, and public policy / David L. Blustein.

p. cm. --- (The LEA series in counseling and psychotherapy)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8058-4376-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 0-8058-5879-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Work—Psychological aspects. 2. Work—Social aspects. 3. Vocational guidance. 4. Psychotherapy—Social aspects. 5. Social policy. I. Title.

II. Series.

BF481.B57 2006

158.7—dc22

2005054162

CIP

Books published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates are printed on acid-free paper, and their bindings are chosen for strength and durability.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Series Foreword	vii
Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
1 Psychology and the Experience of Working: A Blurred Focus That is Sharpening	1
2 The Changing Nature of Work in the 21st Century	27
3 Working as a Means of Survival and Power	67
4 Working as a Means of Social Connection	86
5 Working as a Means of Self-Determination	114
6 Social Barriers and Working: Exploring Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Disability Status, and Social Class at Work	153
7 Implications of an Inclusive Psychology of Working for Research and Theory	196
8 Implications of an Inclusive Psychology of Working for Practice: Counseling and Psychotherapy	243
9 Toward an Inclusive Psychological Practice	275
10 Conclusion—The Future of the Psychology of Working	302
References	317
Acknowledgments	339
Author Index	345
Subject Index	355

CHAPTER 1

Psychology and the Experience of Working: A Blurred Focus That is Sharpening

Work influences us throughout our lives as few activities do. No other choice we make—with the possible exception of our spouse—influences each of us, our families, our children, our values, or our status as much as our choice of a job or occupation. Throughout our lives, but especially from our late teens and early 20s to our 60s, we spend more time engaged in work activities than any other single pursuit (except for sleep, which does not seem to be a pursuit or activity).

—Hulin (2002, p. 8)

We take the position that career choice will be salient only for individuals who believe that their choices are or can be effective (thus self-esteem, locus of control, and attributional concepts are all important), who live in an environment in which their choices truly can be effective, and who are free from survival needs for food, shelter, and safety (Maslow, 1970).

—Harmon and Farmer (1983, p. 64)

Entering the new century of psychology's contributions to the social sciences and to human welfare, we are in a unique position to reappraise our relationship to the study of working. As reflected by the quotes that begin this chapter, the relationship between working and psychology has been complex and somewhat ambivalent within the first century of psychological discourse. In this chapter, I explore the strengths and limitations of existing formulations of working, vocational behavior, and career development. In reviewing the diverse streams of ideas generated from existing psychological discourse, I initiate a critique of traditional perspectives on working, which are often discussed under the rubric of vocational psychology and organizational development. The chapter concludes with a call for a new psy-

chology of working, encompassing a fuller array of relevant issues facing individuals in the 21st century.

Defining the Scope of the Psychology of Working

The psychology-of-working perspective that I advance here is constructed with a deep appreciation of the rich contributions from various sources in the social and behavioral sciences. My position is that working is central to understanding human behavior and the context that frames life experience. In this section, I present many of the intellectual currents that have contributed to my position, culminating in a definition of the meaning and scope of the psychology of working.

In my opinion, the psychological study of working has enormous potential to inform public policy on labor issues, educational reform as well as counseling practice. In this book, I seek to create the scaffolding for subsequent investigations of working. Prior to delineating my definition of the psychology of working, I first describe some historical contributions from outside of psychology that have influenced my formulations.

In the 19th century, Marx (1867) articulated a view of work as a means of self-definition; however, he also critiqued the way in which most workers were exploited, underscoring the divisive disconnection between modes of production and consequent feelings of alienation that characterized the industrial era (and still, unfortunately, is evident in contemporary times). Freud (1930) observed that working helped to provide a sense of regularity to life and a connection to the broader social and cultural community. For both Marx and Freud, working was not a means of achieving personal satisfaction or feelings of achievement. To the contrary, their respective positions were manifestations of the modal experience of 19th-century workers, whose labors were physically arduous and whose connection to the means of production and results of labor were often distant, at best.

Within philosophy, Heidegger (1962) viewed work as a means by which human beings engage in projects, which furnish people with a means of connecting to their world and to establishing continuity in their existence. Gini and Sullivan (1989) also based their definition on a broad philosophical framework by noting that “work is the means by which we become and complete ourselves as persons; we create ourselves in our work” (p. 3). The philosophical positions of Heidegger and Gini and Sullivan, taken together, underscore a sense of self-determination that work entails, which has clearly influenced contemporary psychological considerations of careers and organi-

zational behavior. An economic definition of work can be culled from a landmark report by a special task force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the United States (1973) in which work was defined as activities that result in valuable services and products for others.

From a psychological perspective, O'Brien (1986) defined work as "the expenditure of effort in the performance of a task" (p. 1); this view captures a rather common view of work that has characterized significant scholarship and research, particularly within organizational psychology. Wilson's (1996) sociological definition limits the notion of work to labor that is exerted within the formal economy, which would be characterized by regular schedules and commitments.

When considering these perspectives in tandem, a number of common elements emerge, which have contributed to my multidimensional view of working. My definition of working seeks to embrace the wide scope of work-related activities, with a focus on the psychological meaning that we attach to working:

1. Working functions to provide people with a way to establish an identity and a sense of coherence in their social interactions. In other words, work furnishes at least part of our external identity in the world.
2. Working has very personal meaning that is influenced to a great extent by individual constructions and by socially mediated interactions with others. Working also has unique meaning that is derived from and embedded within specific cultural contexts, which shape and are shaped by individual experiences of working.
3. Working involves effort, activity, and human energy in given tasks that contribute to the overall social and economic welfare of a given culture. This includes paid employment as well as work that one does in caring for others within one's family and community.
4. Working has been one of the constants in our lives; the experience of working unifies human beings across time frames and cultures.

In this book, I focus on the psychological experience of working, embedded within an explicitly contextual framework. My thinking, which is consistent to a great extent with M. S. Richardson's (1993) position and with the recent framework offered by N. Peterson and González (2005), is that the notion of career (reflecting a hierarchical and planned series of jobs that are thoughtfully selected) is deeply embedded in a sociocultural framework that is relevant to only a minority of individuals around the globe. The vast changes in the concept of career, which is reflected in countless articles and

books on the rapid changes in the notion of “career” (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Collin & Young, 2000; Hall, 1996) certainly suggest that very significant shifts are occurring across the globe for many relatively well educated workers. As I argue in this book, I believe that the psychology of working offers the best conceptual tools with which to frame new policy initiatives, practice interventions, and research goals required to address the dramatic changes in the world of work in the 21st century.

The conceptual framework of working described here seeks to embrace work that is engaged in for survival and work that is engaged in as a means of expressing one’s interests in the world. (Ideally, these two motivational aspects of working are intertwined.) I am deliberately constructing a framework that is maximally inclusive, entailing working that occurs in the economic market place as well as work required in caring for loved ones and family members. By drawing the boundaries wide, I hope to create the intellectual space for overarching perspectives, theories, and research findings that will be maximally informative to counseling practice and public policy.

A Sociocultural History of Working

Pre-Industrial Trends

Earliest mentions of working can be traced to the Judeo-Christian Bible, with its graphic and compelling narratives about power, spirituality, conviction, and, of course, work. Work as a form of human expression dates back to our ancient history as hunters and gatherers (Goldschmidt, 1990; Wallman, 1979). Naturally, one of the primary tasks of life then (as it is now, albeit with a few more layers of complexity added) is survival. Indeed, anthropological analyses of contemporary hunting and gathering tribes reveal complex patterns of work that contain many of the foundational elements of current work experiences (Donkin, 2001; Goldschmidt, 1990). One of the major transitions that occurred in many human communities was the development of agriculture, which tended to locate people in stable environments. An outcome of this transition was the increasingly hierarchical nature of work in which men began increasingly to own property and women tended to work in caregiving tasks (Donkin, 2001).

Some of the earliest writings about work can be found in the Bible, which reflects work as the curse of human existence, “... ‘a punishment for Adam’s disobedience.’ Work now involved fatigue and suffering, for nature had ceased to yield her fruits without the application of strenuous human effort”

(Thomas, 1999, p. 4). The view of men and women as lazy and without initiative is in fact reflected in numerous writings in pre-historic and medieval periods (Bettenson, 1947; Donkin, 2001; Ehmer, 2001; Neff, 1985; Thomas, 1999). One of the themes apparent in very early historical contributions is that working was often viewed as being undesirable because of the tediousness, physical exertion, and often inhumane conditions that surrounded many jobs, particularly for the vast majority of individuals who did not own land or own businesses (Firth, 1979; Goldshmidt, 1990; Neff, 1985). As I propose in this book, the pain of many jobs, including considerable physical effort, and the sense of alienation that exists for many individuals in contemporary times, are still major issues and are not solely artifacts of previous historic eras.

The extensive amount of time that people devote to working, coupled with the often challenging and even life-threatening conditions of many jobs, has led to a diverse array of explanations about the nature of working. Prior to the industrial revolution, the number of possible occupations was limited to agriculture, semi-skilled work (e.g., carpentry; masonry), small businesses (e.g., shopkeeper), and a small number of professions (religious callings; medicine; law) (Donkin, 2001; Ehmer, 2001; Neff, 1985). For the most part, the professions were reserved for wealthy individuals or people with powerful and connected families. Similarly, in many countries, owning land and businesses was not open to all individuals, with restrictions often stemming from religious, racial, gender, and ethnic backgrounds as well as the social connections of one's family (Fischer, 2001; Neff, 1985). For this reason, the entire enterprise of working was determined to a significant extent by social position for the vast majority of people in most societies. In general, people worked in farming or in other labor-intensive jobs that were motivated primarily by the need to make a living (Ehmer, 2001; Neff, 1985; Heilbroner & Singer, 1984). The major psychological manifestations of working focused on ways to survive such arduous conditions, with far less attention devoted to finding meaning in one's livelihood (Donkin, 2001). For example, consider the plight of many recent and more remote ancestors of individuals who migrated to the United States or similar places (e.g., Canada, Australia) with the hope of obtaining a better life. As many of us have read and learned in our family histories, working was a major burden, often characterized by significant pain and despair. The sweatshop workers of the urban centers and the sharecroppers of the southern part of the United States shared many common experiences, including very long hours, little financial reward, dangerous working conditions, and often humiliating treatment by one's supervisors (Donkin, 2001; Heilbroner & Singer, 1984; Neff, 1985).

Excerpts from the narratives of these workers are remarkably evocative, as they convey a special aspect of our collective history that is often neglected or lost in our high-technology, information-rich world. Consider the following narrative from Booker T. Washington (1901), who recalled some of his early childhood spent as a slave:

I was asked not long ago to tell something about the sports and pastimes that I engaged in during my youth. Until that question was asked it had never occurred to me that there was no period of my life that was devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour; though I think I would now be a more useful man if I had time for sports. During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take corn, once a week, to be ground. The mill was about three miles from the plantation. This work I always dreaded. The heavy bag of corn would be thrown across the back of the horse, and the corn divided about evenly on each side; but in some way, almost without exception, on these trips, the corn would so shift as to become unbalanced and would fall off the horse, and often I would fall with it. As I was not strong enough to reload the corn upon the horse, I would have to wait, sometimes for many hours, till a chance passer-by came along who would help me out of my trouble. The hours while waiting for some one were usually spent in crying. The time consumed in this way made me late in reaching the mill, and by the time I got my corn ground and reached home it would be far into the night. The road was a lonely one, and often led through dense forests. I was always frightened. The woods were said to be full of soldiers who had deserted from the army, and I had been told that the first thing a deserter did to a Negro boy when he found him alone was to cut off his ears. Besides, when I was late in getting home I knew I would always get a severe scolding or a flogging. (cited in Thomas, 1999, p. 19)

The description of Booker T. Washington's recollections of life as a slave attests to an intermingled set of memories about working and childhood. That Washington recalled his youth as embedded in such an onerous set of tasks is reflective of slavery, which is, thankfully, far less evident around the globe (although not completely eradicated). However, the inner experience that Washington recalls underscores a sense of working that is characterized by feelings of helplessness and fear, which is still common at different points in the lives of many individuals. Thus, this vignette conveys an emotional depth about working that I believe is necessary in understanding the meaning that working can have for individuals and communities.

Pre-industrial musings about working were not entirely filled with despair and sadness. Even among the working classes and farmers, working had the

potential to be rewarding and satisfying, particularly for those who enjoyed the challenges and completion of tasks involved in deriving one's source of sustenance. In addition, working was seen as a means of helping to advance one's unique social position as well as provide connections to one's larger reference group. The following excerpt illustrates an early description of the broader social consequences of work:

Man's industry ... brings impossible things to pass. This industry, oh, it can almost do anything. It has (as it were) removed mountains, or at least made ways through them: so did Caesar over the Alps, and Alexander in his voyage to the Indies. It has dried up and diverted seas and navigable torrents. It has erected hetacombs and pyramids from little atoms of principal materials. It has made glass malleable, instructed in all arts, languages, sciences, professions, found out the use of simples and their compositions, of metals and their digestion, of minerals and their use, of peace, war, justice, religion; nothing has been too hard for the industry of man to cope with and conquer

Now, though I do not believe industry can do all that is boasted of it, yet I do advisedly conclude that in the industry of man there is such a latent power and life of actuation that it comes near the verge of miraculous.
(Waterhouse, 1663, cited in Thomas, 1999, p. 78)

The passage from Waterhouse describes the vibrant sense of agency and achievement that working in a given community can attain. As this passage suggests, working can move from survival to producing substantial changes in our environment, often resulting in beautiful artistic endeavors and adaptive transformations of the environment.

Another view of work has been developed by scholars who have sought to understand the broader or more macro-aspects of working in pre-industrial and early industrial societies. Some of these ideas formed the basis for contemporary economic systems, including both capitalism (Locke, 1690/1975) and socialism (Marx, 1867). The degree to which these economic systems provide equitable and fair means of production and distribution of wealth is beyond the scope of this book. (However, the challenges of determining ways of more effectively distributing *access* to the resources to obtain dignified and meaningful work are relevant to the psychology of working and are discussed in the final chapter.) It is important, though, to note that both of these economic systems, developed by wealthy aristocrats, did not involve the input of the vast majority of workers who would be profoundly influenced by these economic systems, particularly when they were implemented in extremely rigid ways. Questions about the extent to which workers have volition in their lives are still prominent in contemporary discourse (e.g., Gini, 2000; Peterson