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Social Cognitive Career Theory, Generativity and Job Loss

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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Social Cognitive Career Theory, Generativity and Job Loss

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Kevin C. Miller

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

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Abstract

During the last recession career counselors throughout the United States provided direct support

to individuals who were unemployed due to no fault of their own. With males making up 76

percent of net job loss (Engemann and Wall, 2010), it is important for counselors to identify that

many of these individuals are in what Erikson termed the, "Generativity versus Stagnation" stage

of psychosocial development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). This paper focuses on how career

counselors can use social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to assist individuals who are suffering

through job loss during the generativity versus stagnation stage of life. Through the use of SCCT

career counselors will better assist job seekers in finding employment and working through the

seventh stage of Erikson's psychosocial development theory.

Contents

Introduction

During the last recession career counselors throughout the United States provided direct support to individuals who were unemployed due to no fault of their own. With males making up 76 percent of net job loss (Engemann and Wall, 2010), it is important for counselors to identify that many of these individuals are in what Erikson termed the, "Generativity versus Stagnation" stage of psychosocial development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Career and vocational counselors were suddenly inundated with clients that were feeling the effects of job loss. Career counselors need to be able to identify a client's specific situation and address the needs of that individual in a way that assists them in moving forward with their life and career. Combined with traditional counseling theories, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) provides counselors with an approach to assist these individuals. This paper provides counselors with the information necessary to identify these clients and a framework to allow counselors to assist clients in a successful transition to gainful employment.

Review of the Literature

Unemployment and the Recession

The United States government defines people who are unemployed as those who do not have a job and have actively looked for work in the last four weeks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Actively looking for work includes contacting employers (having a job interview), a public or private employment agency, friends or relatives or a school or university employment center. Actively looking for work also includes those who are advertising, sending out resumes, completing applications and checking with professional registers (Engemann & Wall, 2010). Long-term unemployed are categorized as those people unemployed for 27 weeks or longer and are represented as a percent of the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Since the start of the most recent recession in 2008 the unemployment rate has changed dramatically. In December of 2007 the national unemployment rate was 5 percent. At the peak of the recession in October of 2009, the national unemployment rate was 10.0 percent. Prior to October 2009 the last time the unemployment rate was at or above 10.0 percent was from September 1982 to June of 1983. The long-term unemployment rate at the end of 2011 was 4.4 percent. This long-term unemployment rate was the highest rate since record keeping began in 1948 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Recessions do not affect all types of individuals equally. In the most recent recession between December 2007 and June 2009, three-quarters of net job losses were men. Of these men, Black workers lost work at one and a half times that of White males. Furthermore, employment fell at twice the rate for single people than it did for married people (Engemann & Wall, 2010). The impact that the most recent recession has had on men has given it the nickname "man-

cession." According to Hoff Sommers, **"**The hardest hit sectors of our economy were manufacturing and construction. These fields are predominately male where as women are primarily in recession-resistant fields, such as education and health" (2009, p. 1).

Employment differences by sector are only one significant difference that resulted in a higher rate of male unemployment in the most recent recession. According to Engemann and Wall (2010) employment rose among those 55 and older by 4 percent, but fell for those aged 54 and younger. Education level also plays a role in the demographics of unemployed workers. For those with a Bachelor's Degree or a higher level of education, employment rose 0.4 percent from October of 2007 to September of 2009. During that same time period employment for those with only a high school diploma fell 6.8 percent.

Employment in specific sectors (manufacturing, production, etc.) dominated by men cannot completely explain the demographic breakdown of disproportionate job loss between males and females and uneducated younger males versus educated older males. Regardless of industry and education level, vocational counselors saw a high influx of middle-aged males out of work due to the negative job loss associated with the most recent recession and had to adapt to best serve this population (Engemann & Hall, 2010).

Vocational Counseling

Modern vocational counseling's roots go back to Frank Parsons and his book, *Choosing a Vocation* published posthumously in 1909. Parsons believed that assessment should be used to assist an individual in obtaining a clear understanding of self and was important in determining an appropriate vocation**.** Parsons also began the first career counseling practice in the United States, *Vocations Bureau.* The *Vocations Bureau* produced pamphlets that provided readers with

information about different lines of work. The bureau sparked nationwide interest in vocational counseling leading to new vocational classes taught at Harvard University. Seattle, Cincinnati and Minneapolis among other cities also took to the idea of vocational guidance counseling and began some of the first school programs in the nation. A few years later the National Vocational Guidance Association was created and continues today as the National Career Development Association (Kuder, 2008).

Frank Parsons (1909, p. 3) wrote, "The wise selection of the business, profession, trade, or occupation to which one's life is to be devoted and the development of full efficiency in the chosen field are matters of the deepest moment to young men and to the public." Parsons' ideas of vocational counseling to assist individuals in choosing the right career path have been realized, but have adapted throughout the years to reflect the economic state of our country and evolving labor demands.

Furthering the concept of career awareness made popular from the *Vocations Bureau's* pamphlets, the U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration currently operates and maintains databases and programs to assist in career decision-making. One of these databases, the O* NET "contains information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. This database, which is available to the public at no cost, is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation" (U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration, 2013, p.1). The O*NET also provides assessment instruments for those looking for assistance when choosing a new career. Vocational counseling is also offered at universities, colleges, high schools, through private industry and federal and state programs.

When the most recent economic downturn began, public and private career counselors were inundated with out-of-work middle-aged males. To assist in counseling this population it is important for counselors to understand Erikson's Psychosocial Theory and how it applies to these men. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development come from his belief that social demands and maturational forces are what drive humans. Erikson felt that finding a healthy balance in each stage allowed an individual to continue on in a positive way to the next stage or crisis. These psychosocial stages build upon each other and Erikson delineated each stage by age group (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

The Eight Stages

Erikson first published his theory in 1950, in an article entitled *Eight Ages of Man*. To illustrate the eight stages of psychosocial development and promote conversation and research into the effects each stage had on another Erikson created a *Psychosocial Crisis* chart that can be found in Appendix A (Erikson, 1982, p. 56). In *The Life Cycle Complete*, Erikson wrote, "Hope, fidelity and care….are among the psychosocial strengths that emerge from the struggles of syntonic and dystonic tendencies (1982, p.55). Erikson's stages are: Stage 1, Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust during infancy involving the psychosocial strength of Hope. Stage 2, Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt during early childhood with the strength being Will. Stage 3, Initiative vs. Guilt leading towards the virtue of Purpose during what Erikson termed "Play Age" (1982, p.56). Stage 4, Industry vs. Inferiority focuses on the school age person and their desire for the inner characteristic of Competence. Stage 5 occurs during adolescence when individuals are striving for the virtue of Fidelity during the crisis of Identity vs. Identity Confusion. Stage 6, Intimacy vs. Isolation focuses on young adulthood when a person is striving for Love. Stage 7, Generativity vs. Stagnation refers to those in adulthood who are working towards the virtue of Care. The final

stage of Integrity vs. Despair, Disgust involves those at the end of the lifecycle who are developing the strength of Wisdom. Erikson felt most of these terms represent basic qualities that allow young people to enter the lifecycle and elders to finish it (Erikson, 1982, p.55).

Generativity versus Stagnation

The recent recession put many middle-aged men out of work. According to Erikson, these men who are experiencing the crisis of job loss may be in the generativity vs. stagnation stage if the new virtue emerging from this crisis is care (Erikson & Erikson, 1998 p. 67). In this stage the major question an individual is dealing with is "How can I contribute to the world?" (Slater, 2009) and the basic virtue being discussed is care. For many of these men (and women) in stage seven, losing their job leaves them with the crisis of their legacy and wondering what they have created to last.

Erickson's theory of psychosocial development is based on psychoanalytic theory, but not on the concept that personality is based on early childhood experiences alone. Erickson's theory is founded on the belief that culture, history and environment all affect human development through his eight stages (Slater, 2009). Generativity versus stagnation represents the major conflict of adulthood. According to Erikson (1950, page number unknown), "Generativity then is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation…the concept is meant to include…productivity and creativity."

Research on the generativity versus stagnation stage of psychosocial development has reinforced Erikson's assertion that individuals who have successfully transitioned through previous stages of development are more likely to find a healthy balance in this stage. A study conducted by de St. Aubin, McAdams, and Kim (2004) concluded that younger men and women

are less likely to feel as if they have achieved a sense of generativity than middle-aged men and women. The conflict in stage seven, generativity versus stagnation is described by Erikson as tension that exists between two possible outcomes, care and rejectivity (1982). As individuals enter this stage they start to see their life in a new perspective. They begin caring about their legacy and what mark they will leave behind. For many men and women, children are part of their legacy and the recipients of care, nurturing and mentoring. By loving their children, parents are not just parenting, but also creating their legacy by providing future generations with high quality empathetic citizens capable of caring for future generations. Children are not the only way to reach generativity. According to Cooney and Rothrauff, (2008) adults who don't have children are capable of reaching a sense of generativity just like adults who have children.

Every stage of psychosocial development involves a crisis. Greer (1980) describes the crisis of generativity versus stagnation as usually evolving from empty nest syndrome when children leave home, divorce or work related issues such as being fired or having to reenter the labor force after a long absence. Many men who lost their jobs in the recent recession found themselves grappling with the idea that their expected legacy is no longer a possibility while dealing with a change in their life that many had never experienced: unemployment. Many of these men had spent 20 to 30 years working hard, being devoted to their employer and often working for only a few employers throughout the course of their careers. Suddenly, layoffs were happening and newly unemployed men were left with a sense of loss.

In a study conducted by Brewington, Flowers, Furr and Nassar-McMillan (2004) using the Grief Experience Inventory, Loss Version (GEI, LV) results showed that involuntary loss of a job is strongly associated with grief in individuals. The feeling of grief was more prevalent in individuals who had been employed the longest, did not receive adequate notice about being laid

off and those who had dependents. According to this study, the length of notice to be let go was a strong factor inversely related to the grief subscales of despair, guilt, depersonalization, and rumination. Individuals in this study who perceived that they had a low level of job prospects had a higher level of depersonalization and loss of control. When negative feelings associated with grief are present in individuals who have lost a job, it is important that career counselors are able to identify these feelings and behaviors and collaborate with the individual to reconstruct meaning of the event and incorporate that meaning into the context of their lives, both personally and professionally (Neimeyer, 1998).

When career counselors identify that a client in the generativity vs. stagnation stage of psychosocial development is suffering from grief due to involuntarily career change such as a layoff, it is important to debrief with the client by placing significant events into a proper time frame and sequence (Foremann, 1992). According to Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg (1983) this type of intervention allows an individual to recognize that there is some degree of predictability. A client who determines that some of life's events are predictable is then able to realize that they have a degree of control over their own life. When coupled with counseling techniques such as motivational interviewing and encouragement, the client receives support that assists them in coping with the grief and demoralizing nature of being unemployed.

Individuals who are attempting to create a legacy and reach generativity may view an unexpected job loss as a cataclysmic blow to their goals of creating or producing something that will outlive them. By assisting clients in finding a sense of control after a traumatic job loss, counselors are providing encouragement and perspective. This assistance may allow for clients to begin reconstructing their career in a way that lets them feel in control and focus once again on reaching generativity through the goals and expectations of their future career.

In the past ten years, the world economy and the American workplace have changed dramatically. It is important that counselors are able to adjust with trends in employment and the labor force. With changes brought on by a global economy, technological advances, a faster paced work environment and new immigration patterns, work has become more diverse and less predictable for more and more workers (Lent, 2013)**.** In traditional career counseling models, matching job seekers to suitable careers was a primary focus. While still prevalent, this idea of career counseling can be particularly harmful to middle-aged men who have worked a singular job for a singular company for the majority of their career. When unexpectedly laid off it is important that counselors work with individuals to prepare them for a new and evolving job market (Savickas, 2011)**.**

As recently unemployed individuals try to cope with the reality of being jobless it has traditionally been a counselor's responsibility to use a matching paradigm to assist individuals in finding work. Parsons called this matching process "true reasoning" (1909). In this process counselors try to find matches between individuals and job options through assessment and career style interviews. However, with the changing labor force and modern labor demands, many of the workers laid off in the recent recession have found themselves with skills that are in low demand (Lent, 2013). This realization that modern employers do not need an individual's skills only adds to the frustration and fear of the unknown associated with grieving from a lost job.

As individuals trying to create a positive legacy are suddenly beset by financial burdens of unemployment, pressure on individuals to find meaningful employment that will allow for personal satisfaction can be a daunting process. Career counselors working with middle-aged clients should consider using Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) in conjunction with their

personal counseling style to address the specific needs of an individual in Erickson's generativity versus stagnation stage.

SCCT and Generativity

When a client in the generativity versus stagnation stage of his life is experiencing grief from the loss of a job it important that career counselors address both the need of finding meaningful employment for the client and the client's psychosocial need to leave a mark that will last after he is gone. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), derived from Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, can be implemented by a counselor to address both needs.

Developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett, SCCT provides a constructivist view of the client. With this theoretical practice the client is active in his or her experiences when working with the career counselor (Lent and Brown, 1996). Together they look at past experiences from a new perspective while acknowledging that environmental factors such as gender, a recession and geographical location can have an effect on an individual's career (Lent and Brown, 1996).

SCCT is based on interest and choice models (Lent et al., 1994)**.** These models utilize a person's core belief system and environmental variables to assist in developing a career development plan (Lent, 2013). According to Lent, there are 6 common barriers and three main tenets that need to be addressed.

Barriers. When working with a job seeker, SCCT suggests a counselor needs to address the following barriers in order to create and implement a quality career plan: 1) Identify clients with limited interests. 2) Identify limitations of skill level and client's level of self-efficacy. 3) Recognize client's outcome expectations 4) Problems articulating and framing choice goals or

failing to deviate from goals 5) Unknown barriers affecting client. 6) Types of support available to client (Lent, 2013). The first barrier applies to clients who have flat interest profiles. Counselors should be aware that this may be a result of low self-efficacy beliefs and working to expand vocational interests may need to be a part of the career plan. Counselors should focus on positive realistic goals with job seekers who face the second barrier of limited skill levels or low self-efficacy. The third barrier of negative or unrealistic outcomes can be addressed through the counselors' use of providing accurate outcome expectations. When suffering from job loss some clients may find it difficult to articulate or deviate from former goals and counselors can address this barrier by using clarity and specificity to reframe goals (Lent, 2013). The last two barriers focus on unknown barriers and the lack of supports a job seeker may have for his or her chosen career path. Brown and Lent suggest addressing these barriers by assisting clients in managing their barriers and supports through techniques such as role-playing and developing back up plans (1996).

Tenets. In addition to addressing barriers, SCCT focuses on three main tenets: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Self-efficacy is the belief that people have in themselves to successfully complete a given task. Clients experiencing grief from a job loss often feel a strong sense of despair (Brewington, Flowers, Furr & Nassar-McMillan, 2004). Using Social Cognitive Career Theory, counselors can assist clients in building self-efficacy by assisting in identifying examples of personal success in the workplace and acknowledging the validity of a client's current feelings. Focusing on accomplishments, clients can begin to acknowledge their positive attributes instead of ruminating about the negative experience of being let go by a former employer. As an individual's self-efficacy begins to build, feelings of despair become more manageable and less prevalent.

The second tenet of SCCT is establishing outcome expectations. Mentoring younger workers and workplace successes are often seen as accomplishments that will last long after an individual retires. Individuals grieving from an unexpected job loss may wonder what will become of all the hard work, time and devotion they invested in their previous job. This may lead to the belief that nothing will last after they are gone; that they have not left a mark. Outcome expectations are used in SCCT to address perceived results of past experiences. By reframing past experiences and results, counselors can assist clients in determining current expectations grounded in reality. Working with clients to decrease irrational or unrealistic outcome expectations, counselors are helping individuals gain control over their current situation and acknowledge the positive steps being taken, and to construct new meaning in their lives.

The final tenet in SCCT is developing goals. Lent et al., (1994) define a goal as the decision to begin a particular activity or future plan. Goals play a primary role in SCCT and reaching generativity. Assisting clients in setting goals allows for forward motion. With goals to work towards, clients are able to make decisions and take action that will build self-efficacy, move toward employment and move from grief of a lost job to hope of a new future where they can make a difference for the benefit of future generations.

Implications for Career Counselors

Utilizing SCCT in conjunction with a counselor's personal theoretical framework will allow them to better assist job seekers in Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development, generativity vs. stagnation. It is important for career counselors to meet clients where they are. In traditional counseling models assessing a client, researching potential career options and trying a new job or education plan has been successful in matching people to work. However, the longevity of a typical career has changed dramatically in the last 100 years due to many environmental factors such as technological advances and outsourcing. Career counselors need to be aware that when let go from a position many workers realize that their individual skill set may not be of value in the current labor market. Middle-aged men who find themselves skilled in an area of low demand may be questioning their personal worth and their worth to future generations. Acknowledging the psychosocial goal of generativity and its virtue, care, through the use of Social Cognitive Career Theory can allow counselors to connect and build rapport with unemployed adult males who find themselves lost and grieving after a job loss. To assist counselors working with this population a framework is available in Appendix B.

Limitations

Schlossberg described the mature person at any age as being capable of making appropriate decisions by considering alternatives and being involved in the career process (1975, p.39). Identifying that a client's career maturity level is consistent with his or her psychosocial development stage is key to successful vocational guidance. SCCT involves critical thinking, conceptualization of future outcomes and communication between client and counselor. Counselors must be open to assisting individuals to identify their options and be aware that

personal attitudes and beliefs may cause them to stereotype clients based on characteristics such as age, gender and race (Murray, Powers & Havighurst, 1971).

According to Lent and Brown, the SCCT framework "embraces the constructivist view of the person as active shaper of his or her experience" (1996, p. 319). Job seekers suffering from severe and persistent mental illness may not be able to fully engage in reconstructing past career events. Those suffering through involuntary career change may not be prepared to begin exploring and searching for a new career. Counselors should be able to recognize individuals in a state of grief and loss. Counselors must be able to understand the feelings and experiences of the client and communicate with them to assist in gaining a balanced perspective based on their circumstances in order to move forward with the career planning process.

Conclusion

The modern day labor market has created and will continue to create dislocated workers who find themselves unemployed due to no fault of their own because of economic changes and environmental shifts such as outsourcing and technological advances. Traditional matching models are common and effective counseling models used throughout the United States to assist individuals in finding suitable work. Suitable work is often an appropriate goal when economic pressures are a primary concern and finding psychologically satisfying work may be left out of the career counseling process (Lent, 2013 p.12).

Many of these individuals are in the Generativity versus Stagnation stage of Erikson's Psychosocial Development and are trying to create their legacy through parenting and work related accomplishments. The unexpected job loss often results in grief and concern over their ability to realize their career goals and create a personal legacy. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a framework that can be used in addition to traditional career counseling models when working with dislocated workers. The use of SCCT allows a counselor to address the economic need to return to employment, the psychological stresses related to grief and the psychosocial goal of creating a legacy and leaving a mark that will last long after they are gone.

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Appendix A

Erikson's stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Basic Conflict	Outcome
Infancy (birth to 18 months)	Trust vs. Mistrust	Reliable and affectionate care giving allows children to develop a sense of trust.
Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Developing a sense of independence and control over physical skills leads to feelings of autonomy.
Preschool (3 to 5 years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Children assert control and power over environment. Exertion of to much power can lead to disapproval from caregivers creating a sense of guilt.
School Age (6 to 11 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Successful coping with social and academic demands leads to competence.
Adolescence (12 to 18 years)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Personal identity and a sense of self are developed. When successful, youth stay true to themselves.
Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Creation of loving and intimate relationships with others.
Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Feelings of accomplishments develop from the creation and nurturing of things that will out last an individual.
Maturity (65 to death)	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Fulfillment from past life experiences leads towards feelings of wisdom rather than regret and despair.

Adapted from Erikson's Psychosocial Stages Summary Chart (2014)

Appendix B

<u>SCCT and Generativity vs. Stagnation Career Planning Process</u>

Step 1: Is your client in the Generativity vs. Stagnation stage of psychosocial development and suffering from an unexpected lay off?

The individual may have:
- Feelings of grief, despair, or guilt (GEI, LV can be given for a formal evaluation)
- Difficulty accepting the involuntary layoff's negative affect on professional and personal goals
- Concerns with the next step in his or her career
- Identity issues and anxiety about personal legacy

Step 2: Barriers

Barrier Identification	Address Barrier
Does client have limited interests?	Focus on expanding vocational interests through: Career research Informational interviews Interest inventories Job shadowing
Identify level of self-efficacy and limitations of skill level	Create positive and realistic goals to assist in building self-efficacy. Reconstruct past experiences focusing on accomplishments.
Recognize client's negative or unrealistic outcome expectations	Provide accurate outcome expectations. Assist client in eliminating negative or unrealistic expectations.
Problems articulating and framing goals or failing to deviate from goals	Use clarifying and specifying skills to reframe goals and identify past experiences where deviating from intended goals had a positive result. Acknowledge that goals provide organization and guidance during the career planning process.
Assist client in identifying any unknown barriers e.g. environmental, physical	Role-playing can be used to simulate the occurrence of an unexpected barrier.
Identify types of available and unavailable support	Create back up plans to increase likelihood of reaching new career goals. Speak with significant others and important people in clients life

Step 3: Create a flexible Career Development Plan

Step 4: Continue Monitoring the Three Core Tenets of SCCT

Self-Efficacy

Outcome Expectations

Goals