Career Counseling Issues

- **Career counseling** involves facilitating client development of various life roles.

- Effective career counseling can assist clients in making smart decisions related to their work and other life roles.

- Career counseling is especially important because numerous studies indicate that career planning and career counseling are related to job satisfaction and positive mental health.

**Important Terms in Career Counseling**

- **Avocation** - “A chosen activity, not necessarily pursued for money, that gives satisfaction to the individual and fulfills an important aspect of the person’s life” (Neukrug, 1999, p. 264).

- **Career** - “The course of events which constitutes a life; the sequence of occupations and other life roles which combine to express one’s commitment to work in his or her total pattern of self-development; the series of remunerated and nonremunerated positions occupied by a person from adolescence through retirement, of which occupation is only one” (Super, 1976, p. 4).

- **Career counseling** - “One-to-one or small group relationship between a client and a counselor with the goal of helping the client(s) integrate and apply an understanding of self and the environment to make the most appropriate career decision and adjustment” (Sears, 1982, p. 139).

- **Career development** - “A continuous life process through which individuals explore activities, make decisions, and assume a variety of roles. Careers are formulated by the continuous evaluation of personal goals and the perception, assessment, and decisions regarding opportunities to achieve those goals. Career development occurs as educational and vocational pursuits interact with personal goals. It continues over the life span” (NCDA, 2006, p. 6).

- **Job** - “A specific occupation held by an individual at any given time” (Brown & Srebalus, 2003, p. 120).

- **Leisure** - “Planned or spontaneous events, usually relatively short term in nature, aimed at enlightening, entertaining, relaxing, or stimulating the individual” (Brown & Srebalus, 2003, p. 120).

- **Occupation** - “A formally classified work activity that involves a group of people working in different situations” (Brown & Srebalus, 2003, p. 120).

- **Work** - “A paid or unpaid systematic activity aimed at producing something of value for one’s self, others, or a combination thereof” (Brown & Srebalus, 2003, p. 120).

**Major Theories in Career Development**

- Although there are numerous career development theories, the majority of them can be classified into one of the following four approaches:
  - Trait and factor theory
Trait and Factor Theory

**Trait and factor theory of career development** (also known as person-environment fit), involves three basic stages:

1. Clear understanding of aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes;
2. Knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensations, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work;
3. True reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts” (Parsons, 1909, p. 5).

With its primary focus on assessing one’s abilities and interests, the trait and factor approach is didactic and directive.

Psychodynamic Theory

**Psychodynamic career theory** stresses the importance of unconscious motivation and satisfying emotional needs.

Through one’s career choice, individuals seek to express and satisfy needs that were not met by their parents in childhood.

Psychodynamic career theory has been criticized for being too complex and overemphasizing internal factors such as motivation.

Developmental Theories

**Developmental career theories** view one’s career choice as part of a long developmental process beginning with early life events and ending in death. Early life experiences, life events and opportunities, and the maturation process all influence one’s interests, career exploration, and career outcomes.

**Developmental Theories**

Probably the most recognized and extensive career development theory was developed by Donald Super.

Central to Super’s theory is the role of self-concept in career choice and career development; he believed that career development was the process of implementing one’s self-concept.

According to Super, there are five stages of career development, each with substages and corresponding developmental tasks.

The five stages are: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline.

During the **growth stage** (birth to 14 years), individuals begin developing their self-concept as they begin to identify with significant others.

During the **exploration stage** (14 to 24 years of age) adolescents and young adults begin testing out their occupational fantasies through school, work, and leisure activities.
During the **establishment stage** (24 to 44 years of age), the individual seeks to stabilize their career choice and advance in their chosen career.

The **maintenance stage** (44-64 years of age) is characterized by maintaining one’s current status and enjoying the security of seniority.

The final stage is the **decline stage** (64 years through death) in which the individual disengages from their career and begins focusing on retirement, leisure, and avocational activities.

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

**Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)** has its roots in social learning theory and information processing with the key concepts of self-efficacy beliefs (Can I do it?), outcome expectations (If I do it, what will be the outcome?), and career choice barriers (What are the consequences of my career choice?).

The goal of SCCT is to assist clients in making satisfying career choices by examining one’s self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perception of career barriers.

It is believed that all three concepts influence and are influenced by career interests.

Contextual and social cognitive factors influence one’s career interests, goals, and actions.

**Diversity Issues in Career Counseling**

Like most traditional counseling theories, the majority of career counseling theories were developed based on the behaviors of white, middle class, able-bodied heterosexuals.

There are numerous unwritten assumptions embedded in these career counseling theories.

Professional counselors working with diverse populations must infuse culturally sensitive practice when extrapolating from these career development theories.