

## A CASE FOR INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY IN VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Abdollah Shafiabady

University of Allamah Tabatabai

### Abstract

*Vocational development is an active, goal-oriented, and a multidimensional process. It is an implementation of life-style, and the results of interaction among three important variables: self-esteem, need-satisfaction, and decision-making. In this paper, each of the three main determinants of vocational development has been extensively discussed, and their implications for the fields of Counseling and education have been cited. Some propositions which need to be tested have also been presented.*

### Basic Concepts

Vocational development will be construed in this paper as an active and a goal-oriented process. A review of Astin and Nichol's article (1964) supports this notion. The authors believe that the individual implements life goals by the vocation she or he chooses; i.e., through choosing an appropriate occupation the person optimizes the possibility of achieving one's goals. In their words:

....it.....seems likely that life goals are important determiners of career choice and possibly of satisfaction with the career...(pp. 57-58).

The discussion of goals is not a new topic. Adler (1927) in his theory of individual psychology explained goals and discussed their implications for the life situation. He says behaviour can be easily explained if the goals for that behaviour are understood. These principles of individual psychology have been applied both to the field of psychotherapy and education, but not generally utilized to explain the vocational development process. The present paper will therefore comment upon the process of vocational development in terms of the basic concepts of individual psychology.

Personkind is pulled by his needs and or her needs which people can turn into goals. That is, the main purpose of life is to fulfill one's goals in a socially acceptable manner. Mankind strives to become superior, overcoming inferiority feelings. The struggle for superiority by overcoming inferiority feelings is the main life goal proposed by Adler (1927). Man attempts to improve his or her self, and become a person who can live happily with herself or himself and with others. In other words, superiority, perfection, and totality are the goals which motivate the individual's behaviour. Therefore, goals are motivations for behaviour.

Goals are current thought about future behaviour and outcomes and are removed from reality or fictional in this regard. These goals however fictional play an important role in guiding man's behaviour and the choices she or he makes (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). But goals are also developmental with immediate goals leading somewhat to the fictional goals. For instance, to become a teacher may be a fictional goal for a fifth-grade student. To attain his fictional goal, the student must establish some immediate goals: i.e., to go to school, to study, to pass each grade suc-



cessfully, and so forth. As a result, goals are interrelated, and each goal may be a prerequisite for another goal.

The individual's struggle to attain her or his goals needs a prescribed direction which is determined by his or her totality or her or his life-style (Ansbacher, 1967). Life-style is personkind's psychological, physiological, and social characteristics which give a specific direction to a life and the struggle to fulfill goals. Life-style is purposive, unique, and self-consistent; it is formed as the results of interaction between biological and environmental factors. This interaction does not occur passively, but a person actively and consciously determines the direction and the kind of his or her life style. In other words, a person through choices which she or he makes gives a specific direction to his or her life-style.

In summary, goals are determined and also fulfilled within the life-style of the individual. Moreover, a person actively determines her or his life-style on the basis of choice and adjustment among various internal and external events.

Self-esteem is a segment of life-style (Corsini, 1973). The following figure illustrates the interrelation among components of life-style:

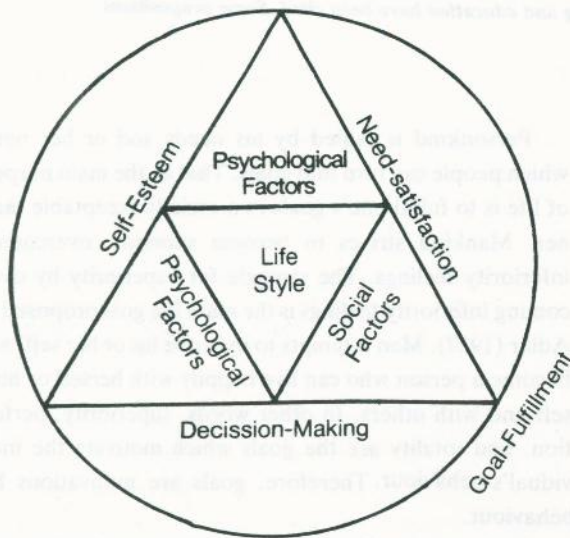


Figure (1) - Interrelation Among Components of life-Style

As shown in Figure (1), life-style is the central theme of life-which is composed of social, physical, and psychological factors. Each of these factors is affected and led in a specific direction through the individual's active role which is carried by her or his decision-making, need-satisfaction, and self-esteem. Finally, the resulting interaction gives a specific direction to goal-fulfillment.

To apply the above-mentioned concepts to the voca-

tional development process, there is a need to analyze carefully the following concepts: self-esteem, need-satisfaction, and the process of decision-making.

### I. Self-Esteem in Vocational Development

Studies of Super (1957) have indicated that the individual's perception of self is an important determinant of vocational development. Each person will become what he or she thinks of himself or herself. If a person perceives herself or himself as worthwhile and intelligent, she or he will attempt to keep up with her or his expectations. In other words, life-style to a great extent is the result of an individual's perception, his or her success, his or her values and attitudes, and his or her abilities. Since vocational development is an implementation of life-style, the evaluative perception of self accounts for a significant part of the process. Coopersmith (1967) claims that individuals with a high level of self-esteem gain a personal satisfaction out of their life and function more effectively. On the other hand, individuals with a low level of self-esteem feel inferior, inadequate, helpless, depressed, and do not assign desirable goals for themselves. At the same time, individuals with a high level of self-esteem assign higher goals for themselves, and they have higher expectations than those with a lower level of self-esteem.

Figure (2) illustrates the components of self-esteem.

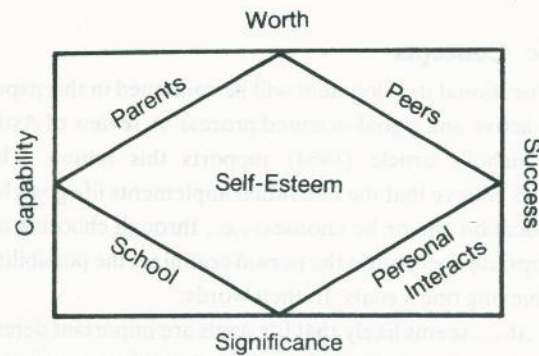


Figure (2) - Components of Self-Esteem.

As Figure (2) demonstrates, self-esteem has four main components; i.e., attitudes towards parents, attitudes towards peers, attitudes towards school, and personal interests (Coopersmith, 1967). Each of these elements plays an important role in determination of the kind and the level of self-esteem, and, as a result, in the determination of one's life-style. The attitudes of an individual towards each of the above-mentioned elements and the kind of experiences she or he has had in dealing with these elements will be a major determinant of her or his capability, worth, suc-



cess, and significance. For example, a person who has always been rejected by his or her parents and his or her peers will tend to have a very hard time evaluating himself or herself as a worthwhile and a significance person. Or a person who has failed doing almost everything in her or his life can not see herself or himself as a capable and a successful individual.

The implications of self-esteem development for family and school situations thus seems to be of great importance. Since parents and school are important determinants of self-esteem, they should be helped to assist the child grow in the manner which can maintain a higher level of self-esteem. As Caplan, et al., (1963) have stated, the school personnel should help the students to know their abilities, liabilities, and find their interests. In this sense, Jordan (1963) states that the person should be helped to develop his exploratory behaviour. It is believed that when the exploratory behaviour is developed, the individual will be able to: 1) estimate his or her abilities and his or her liabilities realistically, 2) get a better sense of comparing himself or herself to the others, 3) find some internal and external sources through which he or she can learn about himself or herself and others, and 4) make more appropriate decisions.

In circumstances in which school functions as a reliable source for development of exploratory behaviour, and also is an accurate source of information, students can experience their real selves and understand themselves. Obviously, family can also be helped to provide the child with opportunities to develop a high and a healthy level of self-esteem. In this sense, programs of parent education become an essential part of the vocational development process.

## II. Need-Satisfaction in Vocational Development

Roe (1957) developed her theory of vocational choice on the basis of need-theory borrowed from Maslow. Maslow believe, in need-satisfaction as the main motivation of the individual's behaviour. Maslow (1954) classifies the basic needs in the following way: physiological needs, safety needs, need for belongingness and love, need for importance, need for information, need for understanding, need for beauty, and need for self-actualization. Maslow believes that the higher order needs are dependent on the lower order needs, and they will not appear until the lower order needs are satisfied.

Roe's theory seems to be a one-dimensional theory of vocational choice; i.e., needs are the only determinant of vocational choice. The author on the other hand, believes

that vocational development is a multidimensional process, and need-satisfaction accounts for only one dimension of the whole process.

It was demonstrated in Figure (1) that life-style has three important components; i.e., physical, psychological, and social. Here, the writer applies the same dimensions to need-theory. Needs, which are satisfied within one's life-style, are only one determinant of behaviour. In other words, the total-life style of the individual: 1) specifies the needs, 2) determines their direction, and 3) satisfies them or replaces them. The components and kinds of need are presented in Figure (3).

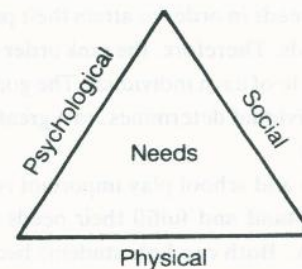


Figure (3) - Components of Need

Physical needs include all of those primary needs which are essential for survival. The individual has always been trying to satisfy her or his physical needs in the best possible way. Work is a media through which a person can provide himself or herself a shelter, food, and other primary needs.

Psychological needs include that category of needs which helps the person feel good about himself or herself and others. The person needs to feel that she or he is accomplishing something. In industrial nations, in most cases, satisfaction of psychological needs has become almost a difficult task because personkind has become extremely overwhelmed by machines. Work especially in a humanistic atmosphere is an important element which satisfies, to a great extent, individuals' psychological needs. Through work each individual contributes to society and takes the responsibility of cooperating with other people; i.e., she or he gives something and receives something else in return (Dreikurs, 1950). The process of cooperation and give and take has a great influence on satisfaction of psychological needs. Unemployment and depression deprives people not only of satisfying their physical needs, but also at satisfying their psychological needs as well.

Psychological needs and social needs are interconnected. People are primarily social beings (Adler, 1927). Being a social animal establishes some needs and responsibilities for human beings. The individual needs to belong



to society and live with other people; at the same time, she or he feels herself or himself responsible for respecting others and extending her or his mental and social skills in order to survive in a complicated civilization and to continue her or his struggle to attain her or his goals. Through work, the individual can learn to accept responsibilities, can learn to work with groups, and can extend his or her mental ability through participation in various social activities.

Since needs are interrelated, they may change rank order depending on the individual's life style. In other words, it is very difficult to rank order these basic needs in general. We know some individuals who sacrifice some of their physical needs in order to attain their psychological or their social needs. Therefore, the rank order of needs varies with the life-style of each individual. The goals and the life-style of the individual determines, to a great extent, which need is primary.

Both family and school play important roles in helping students understand and fulfill their needs in an appropriate framework. Both can help students become aware of their needs, and give them accurate information about the world of work. In this sense, Merwin and Vesta (1959) mention that the individual's perception of needs and his or her degree of understanding of the relationship between various occupations and need-satisfaction is an important determinant of vocational choice.

### III. Decision-Making in Vocational Development

Decision-making is another important dimension of vocational development. Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) are among those who have applied decision-making theory to vocational choice. Everyone in her or his life constantly makes decisions. Decision-making is a required element in dealing with the easiest as well as the most difficult events of daily life.

Decision-making is a process which requires several alternatives. In other words, in order to make a decision the individual must have more than one alternative. Each of the possible alternatives may create specific outcomes which have different psychological values for the individual. To come up with a reasonable decision the individual has to incorporate three sets of factors; i.e., she or he should:

1) search for various alternatives, 2) evaluate each alternative and relate the possible outcomes of each choice to her or his goals, and 3) choose the alternative which helps him or her most to obtain her or his predetermined goals.

Vocational decision-making which is a developmental

process is the result of interaction among three variables: i.e., social, personal, and economic factors. As demonstrated in Figure (4) these variables help the person make a decision which is consistent with his or her life-style, and helps the individual to attain his or her goals.

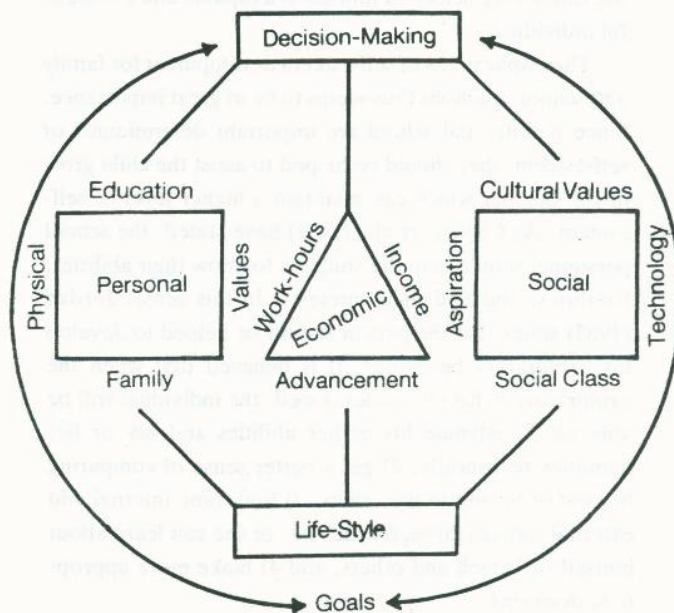


Figure (4) - Components of Decision-Making

As indicated in Figure (4), there is a strong relationship between goals and decision-making. That is, the individual who is motivated by her or his goals is trying to choose those alternatives which facilitates her or his access to her or his predetermined goals. Therefore, decision-making is an active problem-solving process.

The implication of decision-making process for the fields of counseling and education is to help individuals to understand themselves, know their society, and the economy of the work. The rationale behind this implication is that an effective decision-making process requires an adequate and an accurate information-giving system. The individual should not only be informed of the possibilities and opportunities open to him in the present, but he should also be aware of the future changes.

### FOUR PROPOSITIONS

On the basis of the above concepts, the writer presents the following propositions for test.

1. The vocational development process is the result of interaction among self-esteem, need-satisfaction, and decision-making. In other words, vocational development is a multidimensional and complicated process. The process is



active and goal-oriented. That is, the individual has an active role in deciding her or his occupation.

2. Self-esteem is an important variable in the vocational development process. Individuals with a higher level of self-esteem, measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), will demonstrate more satisfaction in their occupation than those with a lower level of self-esteem. Moreover, in choosing an occupation the individual takes into account his beliefs about himself.

3. Need-fulfillment is one dimension of vocational development. Individuals satisfied with their job have satisfied as many of their needs as possible. At the same time, in choosing an occupation, the individual selects those occupations which may satisfy his needs.

4. Vocational development has a lot to do with decision-making ability. Individuals capable of making good decisions are satisfied with their job. Furthermore, there is a time in an individual's life during which she or he has to make a decision and choose an occupation among various alternatives.

Obviously, there is a need to develop some instruments and find some techniques which will help the researcher to investigate and test each proposition.

## References

- Adler, A. **Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology**. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1927.
- Ansbacher, H. L., & Ansbacher, R. (Eds). **The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler**. New York: Basic Books, 1956.
- Ansbacher, H. L. "Life Style: A Historical and Systematic Review," **Journal of Individual Psychology**, 23: 191-209, 1967.
- Astin, A. W. & Nichols, R. C. "Life Goals and Vocational Choice," **Journal of Applied Psychology**, 48: 50-58, 1964.
- Caplan, S. W., et al., "A Theory of Educational and Vocational Choice in Junior High School," **Personnel and Guidance Journal**, 42: 129-135, October, 1963.
- Coopersmith, S. B. **The Antecedents of Self-Esteem**. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1967.
- Corsini, R. (Ed.) **Current Psychotherapies**. Illinois: Itasca, F. E Pescocock Publishers, Inc., 1973.
- Dreikurs, R. **Fundamentals of Adlerian Psychology**, Chicago: Alfred Adler Institute, 1950.
- Jordan, P. J. "Exploratory Behavior: The Formation of Self and Occupational Concepts," in Super, et al., **Career Development: A Self-Concept Theory**. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.
- Maslow, A. H. **Motivation and Personality**. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954.
- Merwin, J. C., Vesta, J. "A Study of Need Theory and Career Choice," **Journal of Counseling Psychology**, 6: 302-308, 1959.
- Roa, A. "Early Determinants of Vocational Choice," **Journal of Counseling Psychology**, 4: 212-217, Fall, 1957.
- Super, D. E. **The Psychology of Careers**. New York: Harper, 1957.
- Tiedeman, D. V., & O'Hara, R. P. **Career Development: Choice and Adjustment**, New Jersey: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963.