

The Psychology of Working Theory

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In the current article, we build on research from vocational psychology, multicultural psychology, intersectionality, and the sociology of work to construct an empirically testable *Psychology of Working Theory* (PWT). Our central aim is to explain the work experiences of all individuals, but particularly people near or in poverty, people who face discrimination and marginalization in their lives, and people facing challenging work-based transitions for which contextual factors are often the primary drivers of the ability to secure decent work. The concept of decent work is defined and positioned as the central variable within the theory. A series of propositions is offered concerning (a) contextual predictors of securing decent work, (b) psychological and economic mediators and moderators of these relations, and (c) outcomes of securing decent work. Recommendations are suggested for researchers seeking to use the theory and practical implications are offered concerning counseling, advocacy, and public policy.

Keywords: psychology of working, decent work, social class, marginalization, work volition

Understanding the role of work in people's lives has been a centerpiece of counseling psychology since the field's inception (Blustein, 2006; Savickas & Baker, 2005). Over the last 60 years, several overarching theories have been proposed attempting to explain how individuals make career decisions and are ultimately satisfied with work, grounded in developmental (Gottfredson, 2005; Hartung, 2013), person-environment fit (Holland, 1997; Swanson & Schneider, 2013), social-cognitive (Lent, 2013; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), and constructivist (Savickas, 2013) perspectives. These theories mainly place internal and individual-level factors (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs, differentiation of interests) in the conceptual foreground while placing contextual and structural factors (e.g., economic constraints, racialized or gendered discrimination, and marginalization) in the conceptual background, often representing secondary parts of models or constructs that are theoretically implied but receive only limited empirical attention.

Our central thesis in this article is that these theories, while capturing essential psychological elements of career development

and work, do not adequately explain the work-based experiences of people on the 'lower rungs of the social position ladder'—people without sufficient access to financial and social capital, marginalized people (i.e., who are marginalized on the basis of factors such as race, ethnicity, social class, and/or gender), and people who are forced to make involuntary work-based transitions—for whom elements of context are often primary in driving the experience of work. In addition, the contextual factors that have shaped the lives of people on the margins are increasingly constraining the lives of the middle class, who face a radically transforming labor market that is being reshaped by globalization, unemployment and underemployment, precarious work, and rapid technological change (Blustein, 2013; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Van Horn, 2014). Given the flux in the occupational landscape, we believe that inclusive theoretical models are needed that integrate broader social and contextual factors with the traditional individual focus of psychologically based theories.

Recently, the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF; Blustein, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2013) was developed to complement existing vocational theories by more directly highlighting the role that social class, privilege, and freedom of choice play in career selection and fulfillment. The PWF proposes that sociocultural factors must be treated as primary in understanding the career decisions and work experiences of all people regardless of background, but in particular those from poor and working-class backgrounds and disenfranchised and marginalized populations. The core aims of the PWF fit well with counseling psychology's emphasis on social justice and multiculturalism, as well as the intersectionality perspective, by offering an integrated perspective on work that cuts across privilege and identity statuses. Research grounded in the PWF has clearly illustrated how social class plays a critical role in the experience of work, particularly for poor and

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working class people (e.g., Ali, 2013; Blustein et al., 2002; Noonan, Hall, & Blustein, 2007), how experiences of discrimination and marginalization impact the career development process (Flores et al., 2011; Egerth, Delaney, Flynn, & Jacobson, 2012), and how high barriers and low work volition (defined here as the perceived capacity to make career decisions, despite constraints) affect career decision making and fulfillment (Blustein, 2008; Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012).

In the current article, we build on this research, related research from vocational psychology, multicultural psychology, intersectionality, the sociology of work, and core propositions from the PWF to construct an empirically testable *Psychology of Working Theory* (PWT). The primary function of this theory is to explain important elements in the process of securing *decent work*—conceptualized and defined below—and describe how performing decent work leads to *need satisfaction*, *work fulfillment*, and *well-being*. We present these ideas in a unified model, integrating numerous empirically and/or theoretically supported relations that have often been examined independently.

Additionally, we acknowledge at the outset that the conceptualization of proximal and distal variables in the theory primarily stems from a North American perspective, specifically a perspective that concerns people living in a society with free-market capitalism where achieving individual fulfillment at work is valued. Although the theory has been constructed within this context, we believe that many of the principles and ideas may be relevant in many regions of the world (particularly countries that have multicultural and relatively affluent, albeit unequal, societies). Indeed, an application of specific aspects and subsets of this theory to diverse locations around the globe may be highly informative in detailing how social and cultural contexts shape the process of seeking out and attaining decent work.

We view our theory as containing elements of collectivist and individualist approaches to work and acknowledge that our dominant perspective is individualistic, with the model capturing how contextual and psychological variables affect an *individual's* ability to secure decent work and how doing so affects the fulfillment of *individual* needs. Our decision to focus on individualistic aspects of work is not based on any implicit or explicit endorsement of individualism; rather, our rationale is based on our intention to embed the theory within the prevailing cultural norms in North America with respect to work and well-being. We do believe that many elements of this theory may be relevant to more collectivist societies; indeed, applying specific aspects of this theory to societies that are more collectivist may help to unpack the ways in which individualistic and collectivist factors shape work-related behaviors and experiences. In the following sections, we review the PWT, highlight and justify our choice of constructs and theoretical propositions, and discuss how this new theory may be useful in research and practice.

Psychology of Working

Although the earliest history of the career development movement included a focus on those with minimal to moderate levels of choice about their work-based decisions (Parsons, 1909), career development, as a discipline and as a set of counseling practices, gradually transitioned to highlight those with greater degrees of

volition and privilege (Blustein, 2006). The movement toward greater levels of volition among the growing middle-class in the United States and other developed nations generated a rich array of career choice and development theories, which provided the intellectual backdrop for the emergence of intervention strategies to foster adaptive choices (see Brown & Lent, 2013, for a review of these theories). Amid this growing world of career development theory, research, and practice, scholars from diverse perspectives, most notably feminist thought (e.g., Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Harmon & Farmer, 1983) and race-based critiques of career counseling (e.g., Smith, 1983) identified the inherent level of privilege that had characterized the world of work for the growing middle class and the wealthy. In short, feminist scholars noted how traditional career theories were constructed around the experiences of men, relegating many women to secondary consideration in the development of theories and practices that related to the full scope of people's lives (e.g., Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). At the same time, scholars from the burgeoning studies of race and culture identified the ways in which career choice and development theories neglected racism and other forms of oppression (Smith, 1983).

Building on these critiques and on other advances in critical psychological discourse, Richardson (1993) and Blustein (2001), respectively, argued that the field of vocational psychology needed to broaden its focus to become more inclusive of everyone who works and who wants to work. In effect, the PWF began initially as a critique of traditional career choice and development discourse, which blended with other social justice-oriented critiques that were advanced by counseling psychology scholars and practitioners.

A more fully realized framework based on the broadening of traditional career choice and development theory emerged in the past decade (Blustein, 2006, 2008, 2013), generating a perspective that has included several interrelated assumptions. Blustein (2013, pp. 7–8) recently summarized the core assumptions of the PWF, which are presented below:

- Work is an essential aspect of life and an essential component of mental health.
- No one epistemology should be privileged over another in the explication of the psychological nature of working.
- The psychological study of working should be inclusive, embracing everyone who works and who wants to work around the globe.
- In many cases and situations, work and nonwork experiences are closely intertwined.
- Work includes efforts within the marketplace as well as caregiving work, which is often not sanctioned socially and economically.
- Working has the potential to fulfill three fundamental human needs—the need for survival and power; the need for social connection; and the need for self-determination.
- To more fully understand the psychological nature of working, careful considerations are needed of relevant social, economic, political, and historical forces, which shape, constrain, and facilitate many aspects of contemporary working.

The theoretical model (see Figure 1) that is advanced in this article emerges logically from each of these assumptions, with a focus on the last assumption, which underscores the strong con-

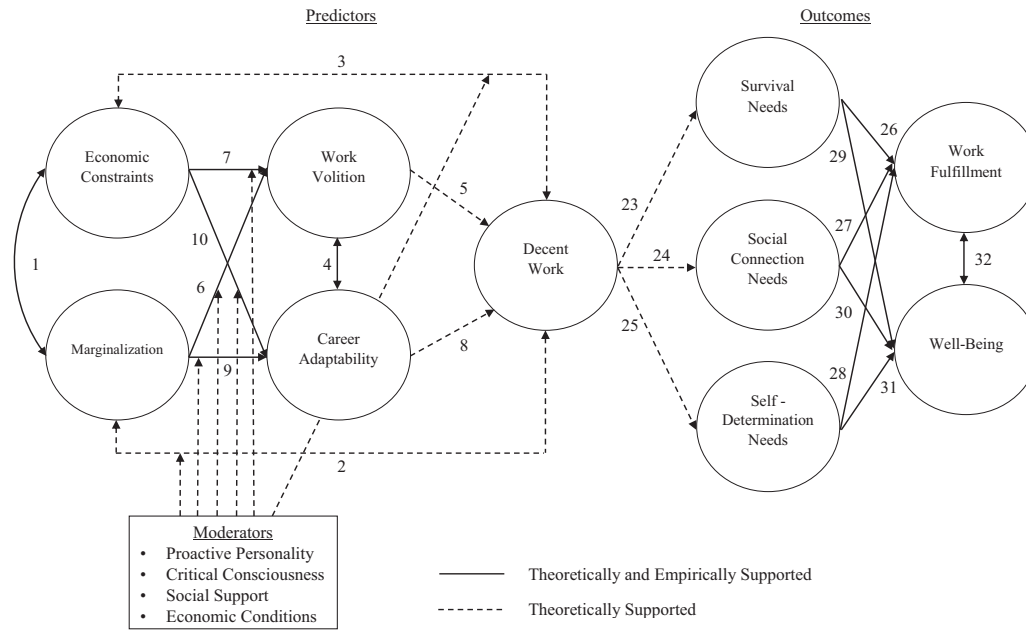


Figure 1. Theoretical Model. Proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, and economic conditions are proposed to moderate the paths from economic constraints and marginalization to work volition, career adaptability, and decent work, respectively: proactive personality (Propositions 11–13), critical consciousness (Propositions 14–16), social support (Propositions 17–19), and economic conditions (Propositions 20–22).

textual nature of the PWF. Many other career choice and development theories have attended to the role of access to opportunity, most notably Super's [1957; Hartung, 2013] life span, life-space theory, Gottfredson's (2005) theory of circumscription and compromise, and Lent, Brown, and Hackett's [1994; Lent, 2013] Social Cognitive Career Theory. Gottfredson's theory is particularly applicable to the PWF considering its focus on how social class and gender coincide with vocational interests to restrict career choices, offering a Zone of Acceptable Alternatives. Other theories emphasizing person-environment fit and/or social-cognitive approaches may be seen as complementary to the PWF by highlighting the precise types of careers individuals chose (e.g., carpenter, mechanic, or teacher) if they have relative degree freedom of choice to select among multiple options. In addition, both developmental and SCCT theories do incorporate contextual elements into their formulations and have advanced ideas that have shaped some of the key foundations for the PWF and related contributions.

However, what is unique about the PWF and the theoretical contribution presented in this article is placing social and economic factors *at the forefront* of our conceptualizations and positioning securing decent work in general (vs. a specific type of career) as the central outcome of the interplay between contextual, psychological, and economic factors. Thus far, the PWF has generated considerable research, theory, and program development, particularly qualitative scholarship that has unpacked the notions of culture and work (Flores et al., 2011; Guerrero & Singh, 2013), the struggles of unemployment (Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013; Lyons, 2011), and relational influences of working (Kenny & Medvide, 2013).

Furthermore, an expansive body of knowledge has been developed on constructs central to the PWF. For example, research on work volition with samples of college students (Duffy, Bott, Allan, & Autin, 2014; Duffy, Diemer, & Jadidian, 2012), adults (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014; Duffy et al., 2012), and the unemployed (Duffy, Bott, Allan, & Torrey, 2013) is reshaping our thinking about the role of choice in educational and work-based transitions. Literature on critical consciousness (CC), defined as a careful and systematic analysis of one's social conditions, the perceived capacity to change them, and individual or collective action to reduce societal inequality, has illuminated relations between how marginalized young people think about and renegotiate their relationships with social, economic, and political forces to progress across a variety of career development domains (e.g., Diemer & Blustein, 2006; O'Connor, 1997; Olle & Fouad, 2015) and to occupational attainment (Diemer, 2009). In addition, the PWF has informed a more inclusive agenda, writ large, in vocational and counseling psychology, with greater attention being devoted to the plight of the unemployed (Blustein et al., 2013), working poor (Ali, 2013), irregular migrant workers (Marfleet & Blustein, 2011), and a host of others who have been marginalized in the career development discourse (see Blustein, 2013, for a review).

At the present time, a number of factors are converging to create a compelling rationale for the PWF to transition to a full-fledged theory. Perhaps foremost among these influences are the rapid changes in the labor market that are resulting in constricting occupational options across an increasingly growing spectrum of workers around the globe (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012; Van Horn, 2014). The conjoint influence of a constricting job market related to the Great Recession, particularly for those

without high levels of skills, coupled with the rapid and pervasive impact of technology (Frey & Osborne, 2013), has created a weak labor market for many people. These factors, when considered collectively, contribute to greater income suppression and greater concentrations of income and (in particular) wealth among the top decile of the population (Piketty, 2014).

Accordingly, the PWF has the potential to generate theory that can blend the best of psychological theories of work and career with sociological (Hotchkiss & Borrow, 1996; Vallas, 2011) and macrolevel, psychological perspectives (Carr, MacLachlan, & Furnham, 2012; MacLachlan, 2014). The emergence of the blended psychological/sociological approach into a full-fledged theory of working for the 21st century optimally will generate considerable research that may foster the design of effective, evidence-based theories and practices to help clients who are facing work-based challenges. Moreover, our clear focus on contextual factors and decent work will provide impetus for scholarship that will inform public policy. Furthermore, the PWF was originally developed to call for a new way of conceptualizing the work lives of those with limited privilege and volition, as opposed to presenting a unified, empirically testable model. As such, this article represents a logical next step in advancing the PWF, with the potential to add unique new knowledge about the challenges that exist for all those who are seeking out dignified and decent work.

Decent Work

A key aspect of this model is our focus on decent work—an important component of well-being and access to opportunity—as an essential and central variable. Decent work is increasingly difficult to obtain (International Labor Organization, 2014; OECD, 2015). The changes in the labor market that were noted in the previous section are reflected in the rise of temporary work, often known as precarious work (Standing, 2010), which is by nature insecure, often part-time, and time-limited. In the United States, a significant proportion of the new jobs that have been developed since the Great Recession (which technically spanned December 2007 to June 2009, yet its effects are continuing to reverberate) are low-wage positions that are often limited to a circumscribed time period and do not offer benefits (such as retirement programs and health insurance; Krugman, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). Accordingly, we position the availability of decent work as an integral part of our model. Our definition of decent work is derived from the International Labor Organization (ILO), which is a specialized agency of the United Nations. The ILO's views about work parallel many of the assumptions of the PWF. For example, the ILO argues that, "work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives" (<http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>).

According to the ILO (2008, 2012), decent work is characterized by four interrelated attributes. First, decent work includes a concerted effort by governments and policy officials to create jobs, which will ensure that reasonable opportunities exist for people who are striving to work. Second, decent work includes guarantees

of rights for workers including, but not limited to, representation, freedom of association, access to collective bargaining, and other legal standards that provide human rights for workers. Third, decent work warrants that social dialogue is sanctioned among workers, employers, and government leaders to facilitate a communitarian versus controlling world of work. Fourth, decent work seeks to "ensure that women and men enjoy working conditions that are safe, allow adequate free time and rest, take into account family and social values, provide for adequate compensation in case of lost or reduced income, and permit access to adequate healthcare" (<http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/decent-work-agenda/lang--en/index.htm>). These four attributes represent an aspirational statement about the nature of working, which provides a useful framework in an era with growing levels of contract work, temporary work, and low wage jobs. Whereas the first three attributes represent aspirations that apply to workers generally, the fourth attribute is specific to an individual's experience at the workplace, which is the centerpiece of the PWT. As such, it is this part of the definition that frames our conceptualization of decent work as it applies to individual workers.

Assessing the extent to which decent work exists is complex and has generated considerable research and debate, primarily within labor economics and other macrolevel social sciences (e.g., Burchell, Schnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2013; Ghai, 2003; ILO, 2012). For the most part, global indices that assess specific aspects of a given community's labor market, legal context with respect to work, social support systems, and labor protection policies have been used to define and measure decent work. To guide macrolevel assessments of decent work, the ILO (2012) has developed conceptual guidance and specific formulas to measure the extent to which workers have access to the conditions that shape one's work life including, but not limited to, union density, occupational safety, legal protection for workers, availability of social security, employment opportunities, reasonable working hours, stable work, and gender equity (see ILO, 2012, for a detailed analysis of global indicators of decent work).

Adapting a construct that has been primarily used within macrolevel analyses to a psychologically based theory evokes challenges, yet we believe offers significant rewards for our field. Most existing measures of job quality within psychology have emerged from I/O psychology and vocational psychology and have focused on a rather circumscribed set of factors, primarily pertaining to the worker's fit with the demands of a given position and/or a worker's subjective experience of satisfaction. Given the vast challenges that working people face currently, we believe that such indices will not suffice for the PWT. The PWT is based on an explicit intention to integrate contextual factors with individual factors in a systematic and theory-driven manner, which we believe is best reflected in the aspirational human rights dimensions of decent work. In keeping with the context-rich tradition of the PWF, we argue that a conceptualization that incorporates contextual factors into an index of one's psychological experience offer enormous potential for advancing scholarship.

As such, we propose that within the PWT, *decent work* consists of: (a) physical and interpersonally safe working conditions (e.g., absent of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), (b) hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, (c) organizational values that complement family and social values, (d) adequate compensation, and (e) access to adequate health care. We propose decent work

exists when *all these components* are present, but also note that it is possible to have some components of decent work, such that the construct is additive in nature. As a means of initiating research on the PWT before the development of formal self-report scales, scholars may find it useful to develop initial rating indices of the main indicators of decent work. These rating scales can be culled from the existing consensus of the primary indices of decent work, which were presented by the ILO (2012). In research where multiple means of assessing a construct are used, scholars may find it helpful to include rating scales and self-report measures in conjunction with macrolevel indices, such as union density, employment to unemployment ratios within adult populations, availability of legal protections for workers and the like. The inclusion of decent work in the PWT offers great promise for our field to join the conversation about this critical aspiration for the world's workers, while also promoting the development of viable psychological measures that can be used in theory-building research, program evaluation, and social advocacy efforts.

Theoretical Propositions

In the following sections, we blend research and theory to build propositions for the empirically testable PWT. In building this theory, our goals are (a) to encapsulate the experience of work for all workers, (b) to position contextual factors as primary in the experience of work, (c) to clearly define and conceptualize each construct within the theory, and (d) to develop a theoretical model as parsimonious as possible for ease of empirical investigation. Specifically, we highlight contextual and psychological variables that are hypothesized to *predict securing decent work*, variables that are hypothesized to *moderate the relations* between predictor variables and decent work, and variables that are hypothesized to be *outcomes of performing decent work*. This theoretical model is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, our intention is to establish a foundation for the theoretical explication of the PWT by focusing on variables that are conceptually connected to the broader vocational psychology, multicultural psychology, intersectionality, and occupational sociological literatures and that may inform evidence-based interventions and policy recommendations. We envision that the PWT can be expanded to encompass additional constructs and contextual factors as research evolves and informs the development of new questions and problems.

Predictors of Securing Decent Work

Intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009) frames our thinking about the proposed contextual inputs to securing decent work in the PWT—marginalization and economic constraints—by advancing our understanding of the unique experiences, restrictions, and affordances provided by social identities and their intersections. The intersectional perspective foregrounds inequality, power, and access while considering the complexities of multiple social identities, beyond a “single-axis” view that only considers race or social class or gender, in isolation. From this perspective, social identities are products of social constructions and structured inequality, such that identity is not an individual characteristic, but a socially embedded location for interlocking axes of marginalization and privilege (Cole, 2009). Each of these identities (e.g., racial, classed, and gendered demographic categories), in isolation

and in synthesis, confers some degree of privilege or marginalization, based on the social constructions, as well as economic arrangements, associated with those identities (Shields, 2008). That is, “[social] category memberships mark groups with unequal access to power and resources” (Cole, 2009, p. 173). Therefore, every person has multiple axes of social identities, some of which confer privilege (e.g., male, affluent, or able-bodied) and others that confer marginalization (e.g., Latino, gay).

Identity, then, represents the multiaxial syntheses of these unique social identities, as well as the uniqueness of specific social identity intersections. As Cole (2009) argues: “social class is shaped by race in unique ways, and race is shaped by class in unique ways” (p. 173). Some argue that multiple socially subordinate identities entail additive or multiplicative levels of oppression—Black women may experience both racism and sexism, for example. Other scholars argue that attempts to add or multiply different forms of oppression amounts to “score keeping,” and that these different forms of marginalization are incommensurable issues that cannot be resolved scientifically (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). From this perspective, Black women experience unique forms of marginalization that are specific to this intersection (e.g., the “intersectional invisibility” germane to membership in multiple socially subordinate categories; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This is distinct from the sexism experienced by White or Latino/a women and distinct from the racism Black men experience (Cole, 2009)—with an emphasis on distinct forms of oppression and marginalization, rather than tallying which social identities experience the greater levels of oppression.

Framed by this perspective, race/ethnicity, social class, gender, and other contextual inputs are key markers of societal privilege and marginalization (Cole, 2009). As such, social identities function as key markers of the ways in which people (and groups of people) are differentially privileged and marginalized in the attainment of decent work. In the PWT, social class is conceptualized as a primary marker of access, or lack thereof, to the economic and social resources that facilitate these career development processes and outcomes (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009). The PWT perspective also recognizes that people also develop a subjective sense of their social class or a social class identity (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000) and social class worldviews (Liu, Ali, Soleck, Hopps, & Pickett, 2004) that also structure interpersonal relationships and discrimination. In the PWT, race or ethnicity and gender represent more phenotypically obvious social markers that structure social interactions, internalized oppression, and interpersonal prejudice (among other phenomena)—while recognizing that race and gender intersect with, and influence access to, the utilization of economic resources in important ways (Conley, 1999; Shields, 2008). Finally, intersectionality helps us to consider how racial or ethnic, class, and gender identities (as well as other social identities) intersect and mutually constitute a matrix of privilege and constraint in the processes of career development and securing of decent work.

To that end, we first review marginalization, focusing primarily on its interpersonal and intrapsychic sequelae, below. After that review, how social class structures access to the economic “building blocks” of career development and the ability to secure decent work is considered. We review marginalization and economic constraints independently below, while fully aware that this is a somewhat artificial distinction made only for conceptual clarity.

Marginalization and economic constraints interact and intersect in important ways (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008), and are proposed to statistically relate in the model (*Proposition 1*). Each are broad and interlocking constructs that represent a wide array of barriers impacting access to decent work. However, for the purposes of illustrating the PWT and maintaining a manageable level of parsimony, we primarily consider their unique, rather than interlocking, impacts below.

Finally, the PWT is intentionally not prescriptive regarding the measurement of marginalization and economic constraints. From an intersectional perspective, we are concerned that attempts to quantify and compare different forms of marginalization and constraint may lead to “score keeping,” or arguing that one form of marginalization is more pervasive and pernicious than another (see Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). From a practical perspective, the PWT was not designed to specify how and in what ways racial or ethnic, classed, gendered, and other forms of marginalization and economic constraints are best measured—or to provide a comprehensive review of each domain. For example, there is no one best social class measure to use for all research purposes (e.g., the McArthur ladder vs. net worth; see Diemer et al., 2013). Instead, measures of subjective social class, such as the McArthur ladder, may be better-suited to inquiry into the interpersonal discrimination and social exclusion that working class college students experience. On the other hand, measures of familial net worth may be better suited to studies of how household economic resources foster postsecondary persistence. Similarly, the PWT is designed to give scholars a conceptual framework from which to proceed, leaving questions of measuring marginalization and economic constraints informed by best practices in these domains, as well as customization for specific research questions.

Marginalization. Marginalization represents the relegation of people (or groups of people) to a less powerful or included position within a society, and experiencing marginalization is a critical barrier to securing decent work. Social class represents one way that people are marginalized. It is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle social class from other forms of marginalization. For example, the gender pay gap reflects the intertwining of gender and social class (Lips, 2013), while longstanding socioeconomic and racial or ethnic inequalities are reflected in income and wealth gaps between Blacks and Whites (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Piketty, 2014). Given that economic constraints and resources will be considered more carefully in the following section, we focus here on groups experiencing other forms of marginalization and interpersonal discrimination: sexual and gender minorities, people with disabling conditions, immigrants, and racial or ethnic minorities.

At their core, social marginalization and oppression reduce equal access to resources and to decent work (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008). Racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of marginalization create real and, often very harsh, barriers that constrain opportunities for people around the globe (ILO, 2014). Moreover, experiences of marginalization, which can be subtle and overt, constrain career development and the capacity to secure decent work among people with socially marginalized identities. For example, experiences of being excluded on the basis of race/ethnicity, gender, and class hamper people’s connection to and investment in mainstream societal institutions, such as the connection to the world of work and to the labor market (Aronson, 2008; Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Merton, 1957).

Field experiments provide rigorous evidence that supports this proposition. Marginalization on the basis of race leads Blacks to feel less connected to K-12 and postsecondary institutions (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Moreover, class-related marginalization leads poor and working class students to feel less connected to their postsecondary institution (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014) and exclusion on the basis of gender leads young women to feel less connected to STEM fields where women are underrepresented (Miyake et al., 2010).

Though discrimination on the basis of ethnic/racial and gender identities has by far the largest literature base, scholars are expanding to the study of other marginalized groups. For example, studies examining disability in the workplace have found social and environmental barriers to positive work experiences for those who identify as having a physical or mental disability (e.g., Crooks, 2007; Horton & Tucker, 2014). In a qualitative study of employed women with musculoskeletal disorders, participants reported that the most powerful barriers they faced as workers were disbelief and lack of understanding from coworkers about the severity of their disability as well as coworkers’ and supervisors’ lack of knowledge about their disability. Participants cited these interpersonal barriers as having influence above and beyond structural barriers like having to climb stairs (Crooks, 2007). Despite legislation in many nations that decrees a “duty to accommodate,” employees face a lack of willingness from employers to create accommodations and social forces that prevent them from exercising their right to accommodations (Crooks, 2007; Horton & Tucker, 2014).

Additionally, workplace marginalization exists for sexual minorities including people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or other nonheterosexual identities. Distinct, but closely related, is discrimination against those who deviate from traditional gender stereotypes, such as transgender people or people who identify with multiple genders or no gender (Brewster, Velez, DeBlare, & Moradi, 2012). Overwhelmingly, the data show that workplace discrimination in these groups—some of whom reside in states in which there are no workplace protection policies for sexual minorities—is prevalent and associated with negative psychological and health outcomes, as well as negative work-related outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction and increased work withdrawal (e.g., McFadden, 2015; Meyer, 2003; Velez & Moradi, 2012).

Another group for which marginalization at work is a common occurrence is immigrant and refugee populations. Immigrants may be discriminated against within a workplace because of visible characteristics indicating that the worker may be from another nation. For example, studies have found that workers in the United States with Japanese and Mexican-Spanish accents have less positive outcomes from managerial decision-making (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010) and are less likely to get hired than people with standard American English accents (Hosoda, Nguyen, & Stone-Romero, 2012). Some immigrants may also face marginalization based on invisible characteristics like lack of legal documentation of residence (Binggeli, Dietz, & Krings, 2013; Marfleet & Blustein, 2011). In the United States, for example, undocumented immigrants face a host of barriers, including lack of access to a social security number and driver’s license, which limits meaningful work choices. Thus, immigrant workers often seek work with long hours, inadequate pay, unsafe conditions, and little

to no protection against exploitation from employers (Binggeli, Dietz, & Krings, 2013; Marfleet & Blustein, 2011).

Though these examples are not exhaustive, they represent major sources of marginalization and discrimination in both access to opportunity and working environments. Accordingly, in the conceptual model, marginalization is posited to serve as a “threat” to securing decent work and career development. Based on the robust literature linking marginalization to negative career development and workplace outcomes, we propose that greater levels of marginalization will diminish the ability to secure decent work (*Proposition 2*).

Economic constraints. The ability to secure decent work is predicated upon having access to opportunity in the world of work. One variable that is integrally linked to access is social class, defined here as a person or group’s position (either a perceived or “subjective” position, such as measured by the MacArthur ladder scale or an “objective” position, as measured by socioeconomic status indicators such as income, educational attainment, or occupational prestige) in the social-economic-cultural hierarchy (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, Lopez, & Reimers, 2013; McLoyd, 1998). Social class plays a critical role in access to the economic resources, as well as social and cultural capital, which facilitate career development and access to decent work. We propose here that social class shapes career development and decent work via two primary mechanisms—economic resources and social or cultural capital. Because the primary focus of the PWT is to document the work lives of those with limited access to opportunity, we conceptualize and specify “economic constraints” as the second contextual variable in the PWT conceptual model, rather than economic resources.

Specifically, economic constraints are primarily defined by limited economic resources (e.g., household income, family wealth) which represent a critical barrier to securing decent work. Economic constraints impact the capacity of a family or a person to invest or access the economic resources that facilitate achievement, career development, and/or occupational attainment, such as, cognitively stimulating experiences and materials during childhood (Huston & Bentley, 2010). Limited economic resources also (generally) constrain the quality and rigor of academic and vocational settings, such that adolescents living in or near poverty tend to attend schools with lower levels of academic rigor and more limited access to the building blocks of career development, such as intrinsically rewarding internship and vocational exploration activities (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009). Economic constraints secondarily encompass access to the social capital facilitative of academic achievement, career development, and occupational attainment, as well as one’s subjective sense of social class position—in relation to other people or groups in a society (McLoyd, 1998).

Each of these dimensions is further reviewed below, focusing on both the positive impacts of economic resources among the more affluent as well as the negative impacts of economic constraints among the poor and working class. We do so to illuminate the generally neglected mechanisms by which economic resources privilege the affluent, while also reviewing the extant literature regarding how economic constraints affect the poor and working class. Although classism (e.g., class-based interpersonal discrimination and class-based social exclusion) also plays a role in career development and decent work, our view is that the interpersonal

discrimination and social exclusion germane to classism plays a less central role in the attainment of decent work (the focus in the present model) than economic constraints. In contrast, it may very well be that interpersonal classism plays a larger role in being satisfied with work—people who feel like they do not belong or do not fit into the social class norms of their workplace may be less satisfied with their work (Liu et al., 2004).

The developmental effects of socioeconomic position are well documented (see Diemer et al., 2013; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Heckman, 2006). Economic resources play a key role in educational outcomes beginning in early childhood. The highly developed literature documenting these effects is informative for illuminating how economic resources contribute to career development and decent work, particularly considering the key role of educational attainment and one’s capacities in the career development process and in accessing decent work (Duncan et al., 1998; Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010; Heckman, 2006). The parent investment model, rooted in economic or sociological perspectives, provides an explanatory theoretical framework—the economic resources associated with social class position allow parents to provide the goods and services that facilitate success and social mobility (Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). For example, a series of studies indicates that economic resources during early childhood, such as the provision of cognitively stimulating experiences and materials (see Huston & Bentley, 2010 for a review) play a critically important role in later educational and economic outcomes (Duncan et al., 1998, 2010; Heckman, 2006). Conversely, economic constraints during childhood have corresponding negative consequences. To give one example, there is strong empirical evidence that poverty during early childhood has more profound consequences for children’s later educational attainment than poverty during other phases of childhood or adolescence (Duncan et al., 2010; Heckman, 2006; McLoyd, 1998).

There is also compelling evidence that social class shapes the frequency and quality of how parents talk with their children—and in ways that contribute to socioeconomic educational disparities (see Reardon, 2011 for a rigorous review of widening socioeconomic disparities in academic achievement). For example, Hart and Risley (1995), in the study that introduced the “Early Catastrophe” and the “30 Million Word Gap,” found that more affluent parents speak to their children more frequently, as well as in more supportive and stimulating ways, than poor and working class parents—and that these speech patterns are associated with children’s vocabulary on school entry. Although it is difficult to disentangle the unique impacts that race/ethnicity and social class each play and it is important to keep in mind racial or ethnic-specific parenting and communication processes, these class distinctions in speech patterns (and their implications for child outcomes) appear to hold across families of color as well (Putnam, 2015).

According to family economic stress models, more affluent parents experience less of the economic stress that diminishes parental relationship quality, psychological well-being, and parental warmth toward children, and as such may have a greater capacity to engage in more frequent and enriching conversations with their children (Conger et al., 1992). The patterns of the family economic stress models have been replicated across studies with a series of diverse families, such as Black and Latino/a families (e.g., Conger et al., 1992; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, &

McLoyd, 2002; for a review see McLoyd, 1998). Similarly, poor and working class parents experience more economic stressors, which diminish parental relationship quality, parental well-being, and parental warmth toward children, which in turn were associated with attenuated opportunities to have more frequent and more enriching dialogue with children in longitudinal research (Furstenberg, Sameroff, Elder, Eccles, & Cook, 1999). These are likely contributors to socioeconomic educational disparities on school entry, in that the parental talk of more affluent parents likely better fosters the vocabulary and expressive abilities of their children, key building blocks of academic success which has been evidenced by socioeconomic differences in standardized achievement scores (Hart & Risley, 1995). Given that families of color also face the additional stressors of racial or ethnic discrimination and social exclusion, the impacts of economic stress on family functioning and child outcomes are likely more amplified among low-income families of color than among low-income White families (as also argued by Furstenberg et al., 1999; McLoyd, 1998).

Moving to adolescence, economic resources—as well as the social connections that these resources provide—foster parents' capacity to connect children to relevant and meaningful work and internship opportunities, as reflected in previous qualitative inquiry (Chaves et al., 2004). These processes in turn foster youths' career development (e.g., helping to enhance internal clarity about one's interests, goals, and abilities) and provide the “resume-building” experiences that make decent work more attainable later in life. Although work in fast food restaurants and the service sector during adolescence may also provide access to mentors and transferrable employability skills (e.g., timeliness, responsiveness to authority, responsibility, etc., see Newman's, 1999 ethnography), these work experiences are not as facilitative of clarifying one's internal psychological vocational needs (e.g., vocational interests, self-efficacy, and values) and of securing decent work. In this context, we see that parental economic resources provide differential access to social networks—which in turn provide adolescent work experiences that have differential roles in fostering career development and securing decent work.

Economic resources also allow more affluent parents to invest time and money into fostering the potential and ability of their children via targeted extracurricular activities that facilitate cognitive stimulation, orient children toward achievement and social mobility (e.g., piano lessons vs. unstructured leisure time), and provide children positive experiences with authority and structured situations, which has been coined “concerted cultivation” in previous qualitative and quantitative inquiry (Lareau, 2003; see also Mandara et al., 2009). During early childhood, access to these experiences (e.g., piano lessons, martial arts, or high-quality preschool) sets the stage for the development of executive function—working memory, the capacity to self-regulate, and cognitive flexibility—that are theorized to play key roles in educational or occupational success across the life span (Diamond, 2013; Raver, Jones, Li-Grining, Zhai, Bub, & Pressler, 2011). Empirical inquiry indicates that economic resources provide affluent adolescents greater access to occupational role models (Ladany, Melnicoff, Constantine, & Love, 1997) as well as high-quality vocational guidance at school (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011; Wilson, 1996) and at home (Blustein, 2001).

Similarly, during early adulthood, economic resources allow parents to send their children to college (and to more selective

colleges), which plays an obviously important role in career development and access to decent work (see Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009 for a comprehensive discussion of this issue and a series of studies supporting these propositions). At labor market entry, economic resources are theorized to allow young people to take on unpaid or low-paying internship and volunteer opportunities, which are often required for entry into some forms of decent work, in that more affluent parents can “subsidize” their children while they participate in personally satisfying (if less financially rewarding) work experiences (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009).

Social class also facilitates access to social and cultural capital. Social capital theory postulates that economic resources create a climate of high expectations and achievement dispositions that children adopt, forming a “habitus” that is believed to contribute to the intergenerational transmission of advantage (Bourdieu, 1986), such as progress in career development and securing decent work (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009). Social class contributes to career development and decent work by providing youth with access to ways of thinking, acting, and interacting (or, habitus) that are more facilitative of occupational success. For example, more affluent parents are theorized to more readily socialize their children into the culture of occupations that offer decent work conditions, which tend to have a middle-class ethos as part of their professional culture (Aronson, 2008). This form of person-environment fit paves the way for work success, such as perceived “fit” during an interview and congruence with other employees and supervisors.

Given that parental involvement in education is associated with children's school success in a series of studies (as summarized in Eccles & Roeser, 2011), this line of inquiry suggests how class contributes to children's career development and (later) ability to secure decent work. Finally, given the long-standing associations between social class and parental expectations as well as between parental expectations and children's educational or occupational attainment (e.g., Diemer & Li, 2012; Williams Shanks & Destin, 2009), we “take it as a given” that economic resources also contribute to career development and decent work via the greater expectations that more affluent parents hold for their children's work life and do not extensively review that literature here.

In summary, this review is intended to demonstrate the well-established linkages over time between economic constraints or resources and key outcomes affecting an individual's eventual ability to secure decent work. Based on these established links between social class, economic constraints, and access to social and cultural capital, we propose that individuals with greater economic constraints will be less likely to secure decent work (*Proposition 3*). Although we hypothesize a linear relation between economic constraints and decent work, it is important to note that the strength of this relation may plateau as economic resources increase. For example, research has consistently demonstrated that the link between income and quality of life is linear to a point, but then plateaus once a certain income level is reached (Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, & Welzel, 2008; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). In other words, once a certain income level is reached, making more than that amount will not have a major impact on one's quality of life. A similar finding may exist linking economic constraints with decent work. The ability to secure decent work may depend on reaching a certain level of economic resources and, once reached, the relations of these variables may plateau. Exam-

ining this potential curvilinear relation in future research on the model will be essential.

Feedback loop. Finally, we would like to note the hypothesized paths connecting marginalization and economic constraints to decent work. According to a number of scholars in psychology, sociology, and economics (Duncan et al., 1998, 2010; Huston & Bentley, 2010; Hotchkiss & Borrow, 1996), engaging in decent work is a well-established pathway for people to increase their economic resources and decrease their experiences with marginalization. Decent work may be a way out of poverty for marginalized people and thus, from an economic standpoint, is viewed as a key target for social intervention. However, the conditions and contexts that smooth the pathways to decent work are notably absent from the lives of many poor and marginalized people (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009; Newman, 1999). Stark, yet widening, disparities in income and in wealth also undermine the promise of work as a pathway to economic mobility (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). Consistent with the tenets of the PWT, we note these contextual constraints not to bury decent work, but to praise it and yet emphasize how social conditions make it difficult for many to realize the promise of the American Dream.

Intersectionality also complicates the trend between social class standing and experiences of marginalization. For example, Black middle class men report more experiences of interpersonal discrimination than poor and working class Black men (as reviewed in Cole, 2009). Presumably, greater levels of economic privilege are associated with greater degrees of intergroup contact with Whites—who microaggress or discriminate against their Black colleagues—as well as a subjective sense of economic fragility among Blacks (generally) new to the middle class. These social identity intersections highlight the need to think carefully about the meaning of decent work, and the complications that ensue—while advocating for greater access to decent work among a broader swath of the population.

Although in the short term we believe that economic constraints and marginalization function as predictors of decent work, for individuals who *are able to secure* decent work, we believe that over time these individuals will (generally) experience less economic constraints and feel less marginalized, particularly when experiences of marginalization occur because of a lack of work and income.

Mediator Variables

The contextual factors reviewed above are proposed to limit the ability to secure decent work, such that individuals with greater economic constraints and marginalization experiences are less likely to secure decent work. We also propose that these contextual experiences play vital roles in securing decent work in part because of an individual's perception of choice in career decision making, otherwise known as work volition (Duffy et al., 2012), and because of the development of self-regulatory career strengths, otherwise known as career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Research has found these two variables to be related (*Proposition 4*), but distinct constructs (Buyukgoze-Kavas, Duffy, & Douglass, 2015; Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015), and are each psychological characteristics that are proposed to mediate the relations between contextual factors and decent work.

Work volition. Work volition is a central construct within the PWT, representing an individual's perception of choice in career decision-making despite constraints. Work volition is a *perception*, which is hypothesized to develop—in part—from *real* structural, environmental and personal barriers and constraints that are prevalent for individuals who experience greater levels of economic constraint and/or marginalization (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2009). However, as a perception, it is also positioned as an attitudinal variable that is malleable. Work volition has been linked with a host of positive outcomes, including increased career maturity, sense of control, and academic satisfaction among college students (Duffy, Bott et al., 2014; Duffy, Diemer, & Jadidian, 2012; Duffy, Douglass et al., 2015; Jadidian & Duffy, 2011) and increased work meaning, person-environment fit, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction among adults (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Duffy, Bott, Allan, & Torrey, 2013; Duffy, Bott, Torrey, & Webster, 2013; Duffy et al., 2012). It has also been found to link to these proximal variables more strongly than assessments of career barriers (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2015). Individuals with greater work volition are more likely to engage in meaningful and fulfilling employment, and thus, we propose that higher work volition will predict a greater likelihood of engaging in decent work (*Proposition 5*).

Research has highlighted how work volition overlaps, but is different from, career-related barriers and contextual factors. For example, Duffy et al. (2012) and Duffy, Diemer, and Jadidian (2012) found work volition to be significantly, but weakly correlated with perceived career barriers for both student and adult populations. Duffy et al. (2015) found work volition to be significantly, moderately correlated with income among employed adults and Duffy, Autin, and Douglass (2015) found an analogous correlation between work volition and income among a different sample of employed adults, as well as moderate correlations with two other indicators of social class. Additionally, in Duffy et al.'s (2015) study, work volition was found to mediate the relation of socioeconomic status to aspects of fulfilling work, such that individuals from higher social status groups were more likely to experience fulfilling work because of increased work volition. These findings suggest that work volition is related to real constraints—such as career barriers and economic constraints—but that the relations are not strong enough to suggest that work volition is completely subsumed by these contextual factors.

The proposed model provides a means of explicating the real impact of barriers in addition to the psychological constructions of barriers. In this manner, this theory is inclusive of an internal psychological perception of choice as well as contextual factors of economic constraints and marginalization. In summary, work volition is conceptualized as a perception that is shaped by, but also somewhat distinct from, real constraints. Given that work volition is a perception, we propose that it is malleable, and may represent an important target for intervention in efforts to secure decent work. Building on findings linking career barriers and aspects of economic resources or constraints to work volition, we propose that marginalization experiences (*Proposition 6*) and economic constraints (*Proposition 7*) will each negatively predict work volition, with work volition serving as a mediator between these variables and engaging in decent work. Additionally, akin to the economic constraints-decent work link, it will be important to examine whether achieving a certain level of economic resources

causes the relation with work volition to plateau, which may suggest a curvilinear (instead of a linear) relation.

Career adaptability. Career adaptability is defined as “a psychological construct that denotes an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development” (Savickas, 2002, p. 156). Like work volition, career adaptability is an individual attribute that is proposed to be affected by contextual factors but is also malleable. Adaptability is a made up of four subcomponents: *concern* about one’s vocational future, feeling in *control* of one’s life and surroundings, having *curiosity* about oneself and vocational opportunities, and having *confidence* in being able to complete tasks and overcome obstacles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). For the past several years, efforts have been made to develop scales to assess the construct (e.g., Öncel, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) and dozens of studies have showcased how feeling adaptable is related to a host of positive vocational outcomes for college students, employed, and unemployed adults (e.g., Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Hirschi & Valero, 2015; Zacher, 2014).

In the ever evolving world of work, adaptability is an increasingly valuable attribute (Savickas, 2002). From a career development perspective, higher levels of career adaptability have been related to increased career maturity and career decision self-efficacy in college students—those more adaptable tend to have a more established vocational identity and feel more confident making career decisions (Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Duffy, Douglass, & Autin, 2015; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). Among adult populations, career adaptability has been linked to increased work fulfillment for those who are employed (Chan & Mai, 2015; Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015; Zacher, 2014) and increased self-efficacy for those searching for work (Guan et al., 2013). The construct is theorized as a self-regulatory strength (Savickas, 2002) and several investigations have identified hope and optimism as key explanatory variables linking career adaptability to positive work related outcomes (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005; Tolentino, Garcia, Lu, Restubog, Bordia, & Plewa, 2014). Feeling concern, control, curiosity, and confidence over one’s career may promote positive attitudes regarding one’s current and future career. Based off this research connecting career adaptability to positive work related outcomes, we propose that individuals with higher levels of career adaptability will be more likely to engage in decent work (*Proposition 8*).

As noted in the sections on contextual factors, adaptive career attitudes are more readily developed and reinforced for individuals from higher social class backgrounds with limited experiences of marginalization (e.g., Diemer & Blustein, 2007). For example, Soresi, Nota, and Ferrari (2012) found all four components of career adaptability to negatively correlate with both internal and external barriers among adolescents. Barto, Lambert, and Brott (2015) demonstrated that career-related obstacles—including facing discrimination—negatively correlated with aspects of adaptability among a sample of predominantly non-White adolescent mothers. Additionally, a robust literature in vocational psychology exists linking analogous constructs such as exploration, self-efficacy, and sense of control to social class and marginalization experiences (Fouad & Kantamneni, 2013; Juntunen, Ali, & Pi-trantonio, 2013). Accordingly, in the model, we propose that marginalization experiences (*Proposition 9*) and economic constraints (*Proposition 10*) will negatively predict career adaptability, and that career adaptability will partially explain the effect of

each these variables on securing decent work. However, again, it will be important to examine if the effect of economic constraints on adaptability plateaus once a certain level of economic resources is reached.

Moderator Variables

In addition to contextual factors directly and indirectly predicting securing decent work, we propose that other psychological and economic variables moderate the relations between contextual factors, decent work, and the mediating variables in this theory—work volition and career adaptability. As defined by Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004), a moderator variable “alters the direction or strength of the relation between a predictor and an outcome” (p. 116). In the PWT, the psychological moderators represent potentially malleable variables—variables that can theoretically be addressed in counseling or intervention that may buffer the impact of economic constraints and marginalization on work volition, career adaptability, and the ability to secure decent work. The economic conditions variable represents a broader contextual variable impacting access to work that is experienced at a macro versus individual level.

For the psychological attributes, we want to be clear upfront that the development of these characteristics is encapsulated within a societal context. We are not suggesting that people with a particular array of psychological attributes can necessarily or readily overcome the obstacles embedded in lack of access to opportunity and the pernicious exposure to social oppression. In fact, we introduce economic conditions as one of our moderators to provide a means of assessing current labor market factors that will likely play a major role in moderating the relations that we are proposing. However, we do believe that people can exercise some agency in their lives, particularly with some viable proximal and distal supports, which can affect the capacity to negotiate contexts and also help them to challenge social barriers. Building from a robust literature in personality, developmental, and vocational psychology, we discuss three potentially malleable variables that may alter the direction and strength of contextual variables to work volition, career adaptability, and decent work: proactive personality, critical consciousness, and social support. We conclude this section with an overview of economic conditions, which although not malleable in a psychological sense like our other proposed moderators, remains essential in developing a richly explanatory PWT.

Proactive personality. The psychological literature is rich with findings on the overlap of personality characteristics and healthy vocational outcomes (Rottinghaus & Miller, 2013). Healthy personality traits are proposed to link with positive work outcomes because of (a) greater resilience in the face of adversity and (b) greater interpersonal likability. A proactive personality, which is distinct from the traditionally less adaptable big 5 personality traits, is equally impactful on work outcomes but may be more amenable to change. Proactive personality is defined as “a disposition toward taking personal initiative to influence one’s environment” (p. 395; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010). In a meta-analysis, Fuller and Marler (2008) found that proactive personality was related to increased subjective (perceived success, job satisfaction) and objective (salary, promotions) career success, proactive behaviors in the job domain (e.g., career initiative, networking), job performance, work related motivation, and overall well-being. Nu-

merous other recent articles have linked proactive personality with increased job search behaviors when unemployed, organizational citizenship behaviors, and work engagement (e.g., Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010).

A proactive personality is something that propels an individual forward to change her or his environment, and may be particularly important when one's environment is less conducive to vocational success. As such, we propose that the relation of contextual factors to work volition, career adaptability, and the ability to secure decent work will be moderated by an individual's proactive personality. Specifically, having a proactive personality will buffer the effects that experiences of marginalization and economic constraints have on feelings of work volition (*Proposition 11*), career adaptability (*Proposition 12*), and the ability to secure decent work (*Proposition 13*).

Critical consciousness. Critical consciousness (CC) is comprised of *critical reflection* (a critical analysis of social and structural contributions to societal inequities), *political efficacy* (the perceived capacity to effect social and political change), and *critical action* (individual or collective action to change perceived inequalities) components (Freire, 1993; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Recent instrument validation studies have provided key construct validity for this conceptualization of CC among samples of predominantly Black lower-income adolescents (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, in press), Latin American adolescents (McWhirter & McWhirter, in press), diverse college students (Thomas et al., 2014), and adolescents residing in El Salvador (Baker & Brookins, 2014).

CC is theorized to facilitate oppressed peoples' capacity to overcome structural constraints and the attainment of desired outcomes (Freire, 1993). CC has been labeled the "antidote to oppression" (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999) and has been associated with positive developmental outcomes among marginalized youth. For example, CC appears to moderate the adverse effects of oppression on mental health among urban Black adolescents (Zimmerman, Ramírez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). Related inquiry also suggests that Black youths' connection to their racial or ethnic group (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003) and awareness that other groups are oppressed (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998) appear to moderate the negative effects of discrimination on academic achievement and self-efficacy. These studies suggest that CC may lead to greater agency by moderating the negative impacts of marginalization and economic constraints on developmental processes.

A series of studies provides evidence for this proposition specific to the career domain. CC has been associated with career development indices such as work salience, vocational identity, and career commitment among urban adolescents (Diemer & Blustein, 2006) and with the vocational expectations of lower-socioeconomic status youth of color (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008) in cross-sectional studies. Related inquiry observed associations between CC and school engagement among urban Black (O'Connor, 1997) and Latin American youth (Ramos-Zayas, 2003). Recent work suggests that CC contributes to academic motivation, achievement and educational/career expectations among Latino/a adolescents; CC is believed to augment students' self-determination and satisfy competence needs as constraints on school and work success are attributed to structural causes (Luginbuhl, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2014). Similarly, within a social-cognitive career framework, CC has been

associated with the outcome expectations of urban adolescents (Olle & Fouad, 2015).

Longitudinal inquiry has advanced the CC-career linkage, demonstrating that CC fosters the vocational expectations and work salience of marginalized youth while including lagged controls and controlling for standardized achievement (Diemer et al., 2010). Finally, greater levels of CC in adolescence have been associated with greater vocational expectations and attaining higher-paying and higher-status occupations in adulthood (while controlling for academic achievement) among marginalized youth followed from age 15 to 25 (Diemer, 2009).

Synthesizing these lines of inquiry suggests that CC may lead to progress in normative developmental tasks, such as school engagement and career development, by attenuating the adverse impacts of racial or ethnic discrimination and socioeconomic inequality. Ramos-Zayas (2003) similarly argued that "a politicized understanding of power, inequality and historical processes . . . actually involves the most disengaged students in a process of CC that can serve as a catalyst for entry into more mainstream mobility routes" (pp. 88–89). In short, CC may help marginalized people engage with pathways to social mobility *despite* these constraints, or enable them to "play the games of school and work on an uneven playing field." As such, we propose that CC will buffer the effects that experiences of marginalization and economic constraints have on feelings of work volition (*Proposition 14*), career adaptability (*Proposition 15*), and the ability to secure decent work (*Proposition 16*).

Social support. The next proposed moderator variable is social support, which is defined in the current theory as the degree to which individuals feel supported from their family, friends, significant others, and broader community for coping with the stress and adversity associated with marginalization and economic constraints (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In Blustein's extension of the PWF into the relational domain (Blustein, 2011), relationships were conceptualized as both contributors to career decision making as well as essential in offering support to individuals at all stages of the career development process. In the current theoretical endeavor, two constructs emerging from the relational theory of working (Blustein, 2011) are used to understand the complex and unique ways that relationships support the attainment of decent work and well-being. The first of these constructs, social support, is postulated to function as an essential mechanism in contributing to how people manage the contextual stressors and supports that frame work-related experiences. Social support has been included in many existing vocational theories as a predictor of academic and career success and is most prominently featured in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Among student populations, studies have demonstrated that career-related supports link with increased general and domain specific self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2003; Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, & White, 2014), increased outcome expectations (Lent, Lopez, Sheu, & Lopez, 2011; Lent, Miller, Smith, Watford, Hui, & Lim, 2015), and decreased perceptions of career barriers (Raque-Bogdan, Klingaman, Martin, & Lucas, 2013). Importantly, studies have found support to be predictive of positive academic and vocational outcomes for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those experiencing marginalization, such as underrepresented/first generation college students (Garriott, Flores, & Martens, 2013; Lent et al., 2011), racial or ethnic minorities (Lent

et al., 2013; Navarro, Flores, Lee, & Gonzalez, 2014), and sexual minorities (Fisher, Gushue, & Cerrone, 2011).

A key difference between SCCT and PWTs conceptualization of support is its position as a direct predictor or as a moderator. In their formative article on social support and well-being, Cohen and Wills (1985) highlighted how support can function as both a direct effect of well-being as well as a moderator between stressful life events and well-being (e.g., the buffering hypothesis). Although both conceptualizations work empirically, Cohen and Wills (1985) suggest that when social support concerns the interpersonal resources available to someone in times of stress, it is best positioned as a buffer (moderator) between this stress and well-being. This buffering hypotheses has been supported in dozens of studies where the impact of adversity or stress in a particular domain or general well-being is diminished when support is high (e.g., Kleiman, Riskind, & Schaefer, 2014; Raffaelli et al., 2013).

For example, researchers have found that the impact of lower socioeconomic status on academic performance (Malecki & Demaray, 2006), financial stress on well-being (Åslund, Larm, Starin, Nilsson, 2014), and minority stress on well-being (Graham & Barnow, 2013; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004) are each diminished when social support in each of these areas is high. We propose that similar effects will be found in our model, as marginalization and economic constraints are each positioned as stressors that can limit an individual's ability to feel adaptive, volitional, and secure decent work. Specifically, we propose that social support will buffer the effects that experiences of marginalization and economic constraints have on feelings of work volition (*Proposition 17*), career adaptability (*Proposition 18*), and the ability to secure decent work (*Proposition 19*).

Economic conditions. In constructing the PWT, we are very much aware that access to decent work and to the promising outcomes of a rewarding work life is shaped by contemporary economic conditions. Considerable research from various disciplines has documented how economic conditions, such as the unemployment rate, accessibility of living wages, job advancement opportunities, access to training, and other economic factors, play a major role in how people fare in developing meaningful work lives and attaining decent work (e.g., ILO, 2008, 2012; OECD, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012). Indeed, much of this research was reviewed earlier in the Economic Constraints section. In contrast to the economic constraints aspect of the PWT, which examined how economic factors affect the individual level, the economic conditions aspect of this model provides an index of contemporary macrolevel factors that moderate the relations of the model that are embedded in the PWT.

Perhaps the most obvious way to assess economic conditions is to use the current unemployment rate in a given nation or region in which the model is being tested. However, following the advice of labor economists (e.g., Economic Policy Institute, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012), we suggest that a broader index of economic conditions be used that incorporates missing workers (i.e., those who have stopped looking for work). The Economic Policy Institute, a United States based economic think tank, provides a well-accepted index of missing workers, which might provide a viable supplement to the reported unemployment rate by the U.S. Department of Labor. In addition, researchers who are interested in using multiple means of assessing economic conditions may find other macrolevel indices of economic conditions to be useful, such as the

growth in new full-time jobs or the ratio of working people to nonworking people. We propose that strong economic conditions (e.g., low unemployment levels) will buffer the effects that experiences of marginalization and economic constraints have on feelings of work volition (*Proposition 20*), career adaptability (*Proposition 21*), and the ability to secure decent work (*Proposition 22*). Specifically, during strong economic conditions the effects of economic constraints and marginalization experiences on these outcomes will be weaker. Finally, although we position the macro level economic conditions as a moderator variable, like social support, it may also function as a direct predictor of work volition, career adaptability, and decent work. Future research will be needed to clarify these relationships.

Outcomes of Decent Work

Thus far, we have defined decent work and developed several evidence and theory based propositions concerning predictors of securing decent work. Now we will turn to outcomes of securing decent work, in particular need satisfaction. Primary to PWT is the importance of working for overall psychological health (Blustein, 2008). Recent decades have shown a burgeoning amount of scholarship demonstrating the potential for work to provide a pathway to meaningfulness, fulfillment, and happiness (e.g., Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010), which may in turn act as a buffer for negative psychological outcomes related to multiple kinds of stress (Mascaro & Rosen, 2006). The demonstrated impacts of working imply that working is essential to human health and wellbeing and our assumption is that there is vast potential for satisfaction of these needs through decent work. Much of the global population, however, has limited access to this type of work and, indeed, work may serve as a platform for oppression, marginalization, and exploitation. We propose that, in these cases, the potential for need fulfillment is stunted, as work may even be detrimental to health and well-being (Blustein, 2006). For individuals with the privilege of obtaining decent work, it is hypothesized that engaging in this type of employment will link to work fulfillment and wellbeing through the satisfaction of three groups of needs: survival needs, social connection needs, and self-determination needs (Blustein et al., 2008). Specifically, we define work fulfillment as work that is personally satisfying and meaningful and define well-being as, "a person's cognitive and affective evaluation of his or her life" (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002, p. 63), with higher well-being being indicative of higher life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect.

Survival needs. Decent work helps individuals meet survival needs, allowing for access to resources such as food, shelter, and social capital. Elemental to the definition of decent work are fair wages, safe working conditions, and security for families (Anker, Chernyshev, Egger, Mehran, & Ritter, 2003). We acknowledge that many people who are working are not able to meet all of their survival needs because of compressed wages and other forms of social marginalization. For the most part, though, a reliable income, safety, and security, which are optimally available via decent work, are primary to adequate access to resources for survival. As such, we propose that performing decent work will help individuals meet survival needs (*Proposition 23*).

Social connection needs. In addition to survival needs, work acts as a pathway for social connectedness (Blustein, 2006, 2011).

Humans share an inherent need for connection, attachment, and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Work can provide a way to satisfy these basic human requirements for social connection primarily formed in the workplace; in this way social connection is an optimal outcome of decent work. This variable differs from our proposed moderator social support that is more focused on interpersonal support primarily outside of the workplace which provides an important contextual resource that helps people to manage the challenges of securing decent work. According to the PWT and the relational theory of working, social connection needs can be fulfilled via two specific and interrelated ways, both of which are located in the occupational realm. First, work can provide a venue for direct interpersonal interactions with others such as coworkers, clients, supervisors, and supervisees. In settings with a positive work climate, this often provides workers with relationships that help to furnish a sense of meaning and connection in life (Blustein, 2011). In addition to direct interpersonal relationships, working can foster social connections indirectly by linking workers to the broader society. This allows an opportunity for workers to feel that they are contributing to their larger economic, political, and social worlds and provides connection for workers to their cultural context (Blustein, 2011).

Inequality in labor based on systematic oppression often inhibits workers from accessing relational need fulfillment at work. Moreover, the changing structure of the labor landscape can produce opportunities for harmful relationships to develop between vulnerable workers (e.g., women, youth, migrant workers; ILO, 2014) and individuals in power positions. Given these findings on how working in healthy workplaces builds connectedness, we propose that performing decent work will aid individuals in meeting social connection needs (*Proposition 24*).

Self-determination needs. Finally, work provides a pathway to self-determination, which refers to the experience of being engaged in activities that are intrinsically or extrinsically motivating in a meaningful and self-regulated fashion (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), proposes that although intrinsic motivation leads to positive academic, work, and well-being outcomes, people still must engage in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding. SDT provides a powerful conceptual lens with which to understand the nature of how people engage in activities that are not necessarily intrinsically interesting; this theory has clear and significant implications for work, which by its nature includes many extrinsically motivating challenges and tasks (Blustein, 2006).

Understanding the various ways that self-determination can be fostered is important within the PWT for a number of reasons. First, the majority of people in the world do not have access to purely intrinsically rewarding jobs, which underscores the need to understand how greater meaning and purpose can be attained at work (Blustein, 2006). Second, given the importance of the experience of self-determination as a predictor of well-being, we propose that decent work, when functioning at its optimal level, should promote the conditions that foster self-determination. A key aspect of SDT is its thoughtful explication of how extrinsically motivated activities are internalized by people. The most extreme form of external motivation is termed introjected regulation, which refers to activities that one does that are purely for survival or to avoid an aversive stimulus. Identified regulation refers to activities that are externally motivated, but in which a person chooses to

engage because of an external benefit (i.e., working a tedious job to support one's family and receive medical benefits). In identified regulation, one begins to identify with the goals and attribute engagement in the activity to an internal locus of control based on a reward. Finally, in integrated regulation, although activities may not be inherently intrinsically rewarding, a person fully integrates these activities into her/his value and motivational systems, creating a sense of self-directed initiation (Blustein, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Along with intrinsic motivation, the latter two categories of motivation—identified regulation and integrated regulation—comprise self-determined activities that create pathways to meaningful work.

In the PWT, the infusion of SDT has a number of important implications for understanding the consequences of decent work. First, research based on the PWT can specify the predictors of self-determined work lives, adding to the explanatory power of SDT. Second, the extensive development of scales to assess general feelings of self-determination at work and other aspects of self-determined behavior provides scholars with accessible resources to foster empirical research based on a thoughtful integration of PWT and SDT (Gagné & Deci, 2004). As such, we propose that performing decent work will be instrumental in promoting the experience of self-determination (*Proposition 25*).

Outcomes of Need Satisfaction

In the proposed model, decent work relates to positive outcomes via satisfaction of survival, social connection, and self-determination needs. We propose that need satisfaction will impact human functioning in two broad domains—work fulfillment and general well-being. Additionally, based on previous research linking these two domains, we propose that there will be substantial overlap between work fulfillment and well-being.

Work fulfillment. Research has consistently demonstrated the link between meeting survival needs at work and being fulfilled with work. At a most basic level, individuals working in low paying jobs—those least likely to earn enough to meet survival needs—tend to be the most dissatisfied with those jobs (Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 1996). Other studies have examined the role of social class—encompassing survival and power—in promoting meaningful work. Allan et al. (2014) found that although people across social class backgrounds derived meaning from similar sources, people from higher social class backgrounds were more likely to experience meaning at work. Similarly, research by Duffy and colleagues (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013) on the construct of a “calling” demonstrated that although people across education and income levels were equally likely to report feeling a calling, people who made more money and had more education were more likely to live their callings out. The authors suggested much of this effect is attributable to lower levels of volition that were a function of lower financial and social capital, which created substantial external barriers. Based on these studies, we propose that meeting survival needs through decent work will predict work fulfillment (*Proposition 26*).

The social connection needs satisfied in decent work also impact work fulfillment for two main reasons. First, numerous studies have demonstrated that sustained, positive, and supportive contact with coworkers is a key predictor of workplace satisfaction (e.g., Ducharme & Martin, 2000; Harris, Winkowski, & Engdahl,

2007). These findings underscore that being around people satisfies the basic need for connection, which boosts fulfillment in a specific environment, in this case, work. Second, satisfying relational needs often involves improving the lives of others, either at work or with work. Grant (2007) proposed a relational approach to work motivation, suggesting that individuals naturally gravitate toward helping others; being able to do this in the workplace ultimately may play a role in leading to work that is meaningful and satisfying. Empirical research has further confirmed this hypothesis: the more individuals are able to benefit the lives of others and see the outcomes of their work, the greater their job satisfaction, sense of meaningfulness, and even performance (e.g., Allan et al., 2014; Grant & Berry, 2011). As such, we propose that meeting social connection needs through decent work—via interpersonal connection and prosocial activity—will predict work fulfillment (*Proposition 27*).

Finally, studies examining self-determination needs at work support core principles of SDT. SDT posits that the more people internalize their work and perceive it as self-motivated, the more likely they are to experience meaningfulness in that work. Empirical studies have consistently supported this idea (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010). For example, Andreassen, Hetland, and Pallesen (2010) found self-determination need satisfaction positively related to work enjoyment in a sample of employees. Likewise, Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) found fulfillment of self-determination needs predicted psychological adjustment of workers in the banking industry. Finally, Deci and colleagues (Deci, Ryan, Gagne, Leone, Usunov, et al., 2001) found that, for workers in both the United States and Bulgaria, need satisfaction positively predicted task engagement and well-being at work. Given this previous evidence, we propose that meeting self-determination needs through decent work will predict work fulfillment (*Proposition 28*).

Well-being. In addition to predicting work fulfillment, we also propose that need satisfaction at work will be related to overall well-being; this relation has been empirically supported in numerous past studies. With regard to survival needs, several studies have examined the role that financial resources play in predicting well-being showing a consistent pattern in the link between income and happiness (e.g., Diener, 2000; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). As noted in the decent work section, the relation is strongly positive until one reaches an income in which people can feel comfortable in terms of survival and power needs (about \$75,000 on average annually in the United States; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). In other words, although more money does not make people exponentially happier, a lack of financial resources severely impairs one's sense of overall well-being. This idea is supported by international data showing the most poverty-stricken nations to be lowest in subjective well-being (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015; Marks, Abdallah, Simms, & Thompson, 2006).

Additionally, research on social connection need fulfillment at work suggests a host of well-being effects. For example, the relational job design literature demonstrates that when people are connected to beneficiaries of their work as well as the role of their job in the larger society, they have a more solid sense of identity, higher self-esteem, and greater social worth (Grant, 2007). Past research shows that greater connectedness and belonging at work relates to positive functioning outside of work (e.g., Simon, Judge, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2010). Conversely, past studies have demonstrated that loneliness at work predicts lower levels of life

satisfaction as well as lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Wright, Burt, & Strongman, 2006). Furthermore, previous research suggests that support from a coworker is more powerful in reducing work anxiety than nonwork support (Lindorff, 2001).

Finally, previous research has demonstrated that fulfillment of self-determination needs at work positively predicts a number of well-being variables (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Data from the SDT literature suggest that pursuit of intrinsic goals positively relates to self-esteem, self-actualization, and negatively relates to depression and anxiety (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Conversely, pursuit of extrinsic goals inversely relates to well-being indicators (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Patrick, Knee, Canevello, and Lonsbary (2007) found that need-satisfaction not only predicted individual well-being, but also positively predicted relationship well-being and relational functioning. Deci et al. (2001) demonstrated that in addition to positive work outcomes, people with greater need satisfaction experienced lower levels of anxiety and higher self-esteem. Additionally, Van den Broeck et al. (2008) showed that among employed adults higher need satisfaction in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness linked with higher life satisfaction and vigor and lower exhaustion. Given the wealth of past research linking need satisfaction to positive psychological and relational functioning, we propose that meeting survival (*Proposition 29*), social connection (*Proposition 30*), and self-determination (*Proposition 31*) needs at work will predict increased well-being. However, akin to the relations of economic constraints to outcomes, it may be that the relation of meeting needs and well-being plateaus at a certain point, suggesting curvilinear relations.

Overlap of outcomes. Lastly, it is important to highlight that previous research has demonstrated that well-being at work and general well-being are strongly related. Generally, past research findings suggest that people who are happy in work tend to be happy in life (e.g., Duffy et al., 2013, 2014; Judge & Watanabe, 1993). Literature on work-family conflict and family work conflict describes how one's work life may impact one's personal life and vice versa (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011; Frye & Breugh, 2004). Likewise, research has demonstrated that satisfaction at work is influenced by a number of off-the-job factors such as self-esteem, general self-efficacy, and emotional stability (Bono & Judge, 2003). Previous scholars have proposed need satisfaction as an antecedent to work fulfillment and, in turn, to well-being, highlighting reciprocal relations between these constructs (Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012). As such, we propose that work fulfillment and well-being will be positively interrelated (*Proposition 32*).

Discussion

Building from the broad disciplines of vocational psychology, multicultural psychology, intersectionality, and the sociology of work, we have presented the *Psychology of Working Theory* (PWT). In developing this theory and associated model (see Figure 1), our goal was to be inclusive of all workers, capturing the primarily contextual and secondarily psychological variables that impact the ability to secure decent work, satisfy needs, and experience work fulfillment and well-being. The theory is intended to

capture essential constructs in the career development process particularly for people who face unsolicited work-based transitions and who struggle with less than optimal volition in their work lives—while also retaining parsimony for the sake of empirical exploration. Additionally, we believe that this theory is relevant to those workers who experience greater levels of privilege and volition. Like the PWF that has informed this theory development project, we argue that PWT has the potential to be broadly relevant, with the capacity to explain the work-related behaviors of a wide array of populations. The development of this theory optimally will have important implications for research, practice, and policy, which are summarized below.

Research Implications

Studying contextual influences on career behavior is not a groundbreaking idea within counseling psychology. In fact, many traditional vocational theories have focused on how aspects of social class and culture, as well as experiences of marginalization, relate to the career development process for students and adults. The PWT is not intended to compete with these theories but rather offer an alternative perspective that (a) provides a viable means of understanding the work lives of everyone who works and who would like to work, regardless of their level of access to financial and social capital; (b) treats contextual factors as the primary predictor variables; and (c) focuses on securing decent work as the central goal of the career development process. With these new contributions in mind, we envision several fruitful research directions.

First and foremost, this model is meant to undergo empirical exploration. Indeed, it will be important to test each of the 32 propositions. This line of research will require data gathered among a diverse population of adults, first by testing the core propositions particularly around decent work. Then, as research progresses, it will be important to assess how these variables function over a period of time to witness real changes in individual's career development. Using longitudinal data to examine the model's propositions in particular will help refine the theory by demonstrating which variables are most predictive of securing decent work and if there are variables that can be trimmed, resulting in greater parsimony without losing predictive power.

Second, the PWT has significant implications for the synthesis of sociological and psychological models of work and career. Rather than existing in a disciplinary space that is defined a priori by academic convention, the PWT strives to capture an authentic picture of how people negotiate their contexts and their internal psychological resources in developing their work lives. Given this integrative perspective, we believe that research emerging from this model has the potential to help identify optimal contextual conditions and corollary psychological resources that can help people navigate the increasingly troubled waters of the world of work. Moreover, the PWT can provide an exemplar of a research trajectory that seeks to transcend disciplines, which may be increasingly critical as problems with obtaining access to decent work become a growing challenge for individuals and for communities.

A third research trajectory is in the area of decent work. Decent work is emerging as an important concept in public policy contexts, but has not yet been studied in depth within psychology. In

particular, no psychological research has been conducted using the ILO (2008) conceptualization of decent work; as such, these paths in the model are only theoretically implied. By exploring the paths embedded in this model, greater empirical clarity may be obtained on the nature of decent work, the ways in which people can attain decent work, and the consequences of decent work. In keeping with the public policy and human rights underpinnings of decent work (ILO, 2014), the PWT model can identify the precise ways that access to opportunity functions in determining access to decent work. More important, the infusion of psychological constructs in this model provides a broad lens that may help to explicate decent work in a way not yet possible to date. Furthermore, the PWT can identify and define ways to assess decent work. For example, scholars studying decent work may benefit by developing rating scales and self-report measures that provide multidimensional means of assessing decent work, which offer an important alternative to the macrolevel indices that have been used to define decent work to date. Using the PWT model, scholars may be able to assess the construct validity of the definitions of decent work in relation to a number of conceptually related constructs.

Practice Implications

The PWT offers significant implications for counseling practice, preventive initiatives, and social justice advocacy. In terms of individual counseling, research utilizing the PWT has the potential to identify the role of inherently mutable constructs that can be readily incorporated into practice. For example, identifying the importance of critical consciousness in helping people to advocate for decency and equity may provide evidence-based ideas for interventions that may mobilize client populations who struggle with making meaning of the underlying systemic factors that are playing a role in their work lives. In addition, by clearly measuring contextual factors within a psychological model, practitioners may be able to develop counseling interventions that help clients to frame the cause of their work struggles in a manner that is both accurate and adaptive. By documenting how the context is responsible for access to work, counselors will have an evidence-based response for clients who may be prone to blame themselves for unemployment, underemployment, and other work-related challenges. In terms of prevention, the PWT may provide empirically derived knowledge about the putative impact of psychoeducational interventions that are designed to bolster proactive personality, career adaptability, work volition, and social support.

Perhaps the most critical practice aspect of the PWT relates to the growing need for social advocacy within the public policy arenas with respect to decent work. As we noted in this article, considerable research exists pointing to the growing diminishment of decent work for large cohorts of working people, particularly those without 21st century skills and those whose skills can be easily replaced by technology (ILO, 2014; OECD, 2015). Research emerging from the PWT can document clearly and precisely the impact of loss of access to work for people and communities. In addition, the influence of contextual factors can be assessed in relation to psychological factors, providing insights into the complexities of person-environment interactions in an era of radically changing work opportunities. These findings may be integral in informing public policy that blends individual, contextual, and economic advocacy.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with any theoretical perspective, the strengths of the PWT are accompanied by several limitations. Primarily, the theory in its current state may be limited in the extent to which it is generalizable outside of North America, and particularly outside of an individualistic cultural framework. Although we draw from a large body of work to support the PWT, most of these sources come from research conducted within North America. Thus, there is strong support for the utility of the PWT in North America, but researchers and practitioners must exercise caution when extending these findings to other nations and regions of the world.

It is of primary importance in the PWT to be inclusive of the many different stories that make up the work experiences of people with diverse backgrounds—as opposed to telling the single story of a middle class American career trajectory that has been most prominent in past vocational research. Highlighting diversity of work experiences and emphasizing inclusivity in vocational research and practice poses a challenge to the PWT and any vocational model—attempting to balance parsimony and inclusivity. Parsimony is key to the utility of a theoretical model (Bentler & Mooijaart, 1989); however, this may limit generalizability and exclude important predictor variables. For example, the current model does not include mental health status, which has previously been found to impact attainment of positive work experiences (e.g., Dawson, Frieters, Johnston, & Shields, 2015; Veliziotis, Matsaganis, & Karakitsios, 2015). Because parsimony is crucial in the precision of any theoretical model, future researchers must think critically and integrate empirical findings to maintain simplicity of the model while remaining aware that important variables may be missing.

In the spirit of establishing the simplest, most precise, and most generalizable model, more work needs to be done regarding the mechanisms of attaining decent work and relations between decent work, need satisfaction, work fulfillment, and well-being across cultures. As previously stated, the current PWT model is based primarily on work that was conducted in North America and is rooted in a Western, individualistic cultural framework. This may be problematic because the PWT assumes that survival, social connectedness, and self-determination are basic human needs (Blustein, 2006, 2013; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Self-determination needs, for example, operate on the assumption that the “self” is an individual distinct from the group and values self-directed behavior. This may be inconsistent with collectivist values that conceptualize the self as part of a larger group and prioritize interpersonal harmony over individual autonomy (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Although there is research showing that fulfillment of self-determination needs predicts psychological well-being in collectivist nations (Church et al., 2013; Deci & Ryan, 2008), it is possible that the underlying mechanisms of these relations may differ cross-culturally. In the future, it will be important to examine cross-cultural validity of PWT to expand inclusivity of the model beyond its current individualistic framework.

Conclusion

In closing, we have sought to present a compelling case in this article for the development of a fully operational PWT. We believe that the PWT and the research that has emerged from this perspec-

tive have created a rich soil from which to develop an empirically rooted, interdisciplinary theory that can substantially advance scholarship, practice, and policy advocacy. Developing a theory during this current period of instability at work is certainly daunting; however, we believe that this theory’s conceptual elements are coherent, yet flexible enough to provide a powerful means of explicating critical aspects of work for all those who seek decent and dignified work. Our hope is that this theory will stimulate considerable research that can document in a clear and compelling fashion the critical functions that decent work serves in the lives of people and communities.

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