

The background of the cover is an abstract geometric pattern composed of numerous overlapping triangles. The color palette transitions from warm reds and oranges at the top to cool blues and purples at the bottom, with a central dark blue rectangular area containing the text.

INTEGRATING CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH IN COUNSELING

Seth C. W. Hayden, PhD.

Integrating Career Development and Mental Health in Counseling

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SETH C. W. HAYDEN



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American Counseling Association
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And to all counselors who tirelessly strive to alleviate suffering and enhance career and mental well-being. Your efforts to support those in need truly make the world a better place.

Relevance of Career Development in Counseling

“So, tell me about the binder,” I asked. This statement arose out of curiosity while engaging with someone in a university career center. They came to the university career center for a résumé critique, a reasonably common request in this context. Facilitating a résumé critique is often a relatively straightforward task in which the career practitioner reacts to the information in the document to determine strategies for effectively conveying one’s educational and professional background to secure an opportunity or position. This activity occurred frequently in my work in this facility. Given my background as a mental health counselor and my burgeoning interest in the connection between career development and mental health, I tended to consider the broader context of individuals’ experiences in relation to career and work regardless of the perceived need (e.g., résumé critique, interviewing skills, negotiating a job offer). Most often, these inquiries would uncover a reasonable response directly connected to their perceived need. In this instance, my mindset of comprehensive analysis got the best of me when viewing their significantly large binder. This statement led us down a path to a significant mental health assessment and referral, which was the protocol within this facility.

I have often reflected on this experience as an example of the connection between career development and mental health. Though this occurred within the context of a career center, the experience of career and personal struggles is not facility-specific. I've had several experiences across various settings (e.g., community agency, hospital, secondary school) in which co-occurring career and personal concerns were presented. My training as a counselor, focused on wellness, created a lens of seeing all aspects of the human experience as interconnected. My work in my doctoral program in a community-facing training clinic focused on career added depth to my awareness of the impact of the interconnection between career and mental health.

As a counselor educator, I have encountered students who demonstrated a rather tepid interest upon their initial exposure to the subject matter of "career." This was, in fact, my own first reaction to the study of the career realm. Like me, however, the students soon realize the salience of this aspect of people's experience upon the commencement of their clinical training. The training of counselors often involves compartmentalizing specific topics within distinct courses, with those specializing in clinical mental health counseling primarily focusing on mental diagnoses and illness, minimizing career as a primary concern.

Events such as the global pandemic, economic downturns, and other societal factors significantly affect people's ability to fully engage in positive career development and mental health. Given the significant impact of these experiences, counselors are well positioned to support those in need in various settings. Being intentional in learning critical elements of providing career and mental health support is essential to holistically addressing complex concerns.

Career is a central feature of the human experience and, therefore, an essential element of professional counseling. The beginning of the counseling profession in the United States is attributed to Frank Parsons and his establishment of a career counseling center in Boston in 1909 (Hartung & Blustein, 2002). Contemporary formulations of wellness, such as the "Indivisible Self" (Myers & Sweeney, 2004), also indicate career as an essential element of wellness.

Career Development in Relation to Prevention and Wellness

The Indivisible Self Evidence-Based Model identifies career as a secondary factor within the primary factor of Creativity (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The interconnected domains indicate the relationship between

different elements of functioning (see Figure 1.1). As one experiences challenges in one area, it will likely contribute to difficulties in other domains. For example, anxiety around making a career decision might contribute to challenges in one's relationships, sleeping patterns, etc. A point of hope for counselors related to this interconnectedness is that receiving positive support with a concern can have positive manifestations across other domains of functioning. This speaks to the importance of offering effective support in multiple areas of an individual's experience. More specifically, research on wellness and career-sustaining behaviors for professional counselors found a link between these variables (Lawson & Myers, 2011), further illustrating the connection between career and wellness.

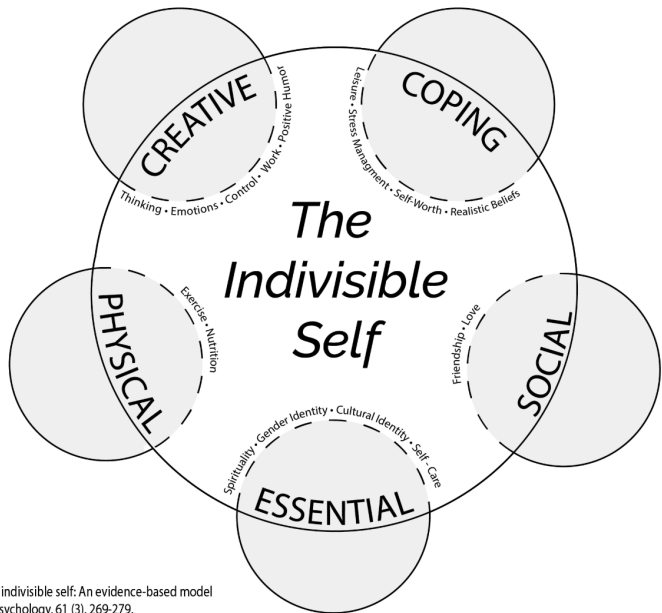
Figure 1.1

The Indivisible Self Model

The Indivisible Self

CONTEXTS:

- Local (safety)
 - Family
 - Neighborhood
 - Community
- Institutional (policies & laws)
 - Education
 - Religion
 - Government
 - Business/Industry
- Global (world events)
 - Politics
 - Culture
 - Global Events
 - Environment
 - Media
 - Community
- Chronometrical (lifespan)
 - Perpetual
 - Positive
 - Purposeful



Myers, J. E., & Sweeney, T.J. (2005). The indivisible self: An evidence-based model of wellness. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 61 (3), 269-279.

Researchers have also linked career development with prevention, a primary focus of the counseling profession. The effects of providing effective career support related to mental health and wellness factors can mitigate deleterious outcomes in these domains (Kenny & Di Fabio, 2009). Career development support also has the potential to enhance personal

agency by empowering individuals with skills for effective career decision-making and problem-solving (Hayden et al., 2021). Prevention and wellness and their connection to career development offer further evidence of focusing on career development within counseling.

Centrality of Career in the Counseling Profession

Researchers have long considered the relationship between career-focused counseling and traditional psychotherapy (McIlveen, 2015). The connection between mental health and career issues frequently leads mental health-focused counselors to help their clients deal with work satisfaction, underemployment, or unemployment through psychotherapy (Cardoso, 2016).

The definition of counseling, in addition to accreditation standards, specifically identifies career as an essential component of counseling practice. The *20/20: A Vision for the Profession of Counseling* project was a multi-year endeavor to develop a consensus definition of the counseling profession. Through an intensive process that implemented a Delphi method (i.e., input from experts) and consultations with divisions of the American Counseling Association (ACA), the project produced a consensus definition of counseling: “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.” (Kaplan et al., 2014). The inclusion of “career” in this definition highlights its importance within a conceptualization of counseling.

The National Career Development Association (NCDA), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), predates ACA with its initiation as the National Vocational Guidance Association in 1913 (NCDA, n.d.). This illustrates the long history of career development and counseling within the counseling profession and in the United States.

In addition, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accreditation standards have consistently included career development in the foundational counseling curriculum. This has precipitated the provision of a specific career development and counseling course in CACREP-accredited programs of study. The 2024 standards pertaining to career development and counseling include the following: theories and approaches to career development and decision-making (Standard 3.D.1); approaches for conceptualizing the interrelationships among and between work, socioeconomic standing, wellness, disability, trauma, relationships, and other life roles and factors (Standard 3.D.2); developmentally responsive

strategies for empowering individuals to engage in culturally sustaining career and educational development and employment opportunities (Standard 3.D.7); and strategies for improving access to educational and occupational opportunities for people from marginalized groups (Standard 3.D.11; CACREP, 2023). The definition of counseling, the inclusion in accreditation standards, and the history of career development in relation to the profession emphasize the importance of this topic within counseling services.

Despite these indicators of this topic's importance within counseling, it is a puzzling reality that students often view career development as less important than other topics within the counseling curriculum. Instructors of the career course indicated the challenge of engaging students in a topic they had little interest in, as well as making the course relevant for them (Osborn & Dames, 2013). In addition, professional school counselors have indicated a lack of confidence in facilitating career readiness in their settings, in both practice and training (Ockerman et al., 2023; Novakovic et al., 2021). Research has indicated that school counselors are more likely to engage in college and career readiness activities when they feel it is important (Novakovic et al., 2021; Anctil et al., 2012), emphasizing the need to elevate career development and counseling within counselor education and training as it impacts the delivery of counseling services.

This creates a unique tension in the preparation of counselors to effectively address career concerns within counseling, as there is a misalignment between the profession and the aspirations of those pursuing careers as counselors. One of the aims of this text is to support those associated with counseling in approaching career concerns both clinically and pedagogically by enhancing their understanding of the complexity of career development, its connection to mental health, and instilling enthusiasm for the subject matter.

Definition of Terms

Before discussing career development and its relevance to counseling, it is important to acknowledge the terminology used to define elements of career development support. There are variations in the specific terms used to describe career services, impacted by history, the context of service delivery, and global elements. Savickas (2003) has spoken at length about the origin of career support in vocational guidance and the evolution of language in describing the iterations of career support. Herr (2013) detailed the history of vocational guidance and its ongoing

development in the counseling profession. The following are specific descriptions of various career and vocational support iterations to ensure the reader understands their similarities and differences as we examine career development within counseling. They are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

1. *Career coaching*: Future-focused support involving a more directive approach in which concrete steps are provided for the individual to research and reflect on their careers (indicated by Megan Collins Myers in Lupton-Smith et al., 2024).
2. *Career counseling*: A specialty within the profession of counseling, one that fosters vocational development and work adjustment of individuals at each life stage by engaging them in life planning aimed at the psychosocial integration of individual's abilities, interests, and goals with the work roles structured by the community and occupations organized by companies (Savickas, 2003).
3. *Career development*: Lifelong psychological and behavioral processes and contextual influences shaping one's career over the lifespan (Niles & Karajic, 2008).
4. *Career education*: Refers to the totality of experiences (school-based and otherwise) that help individuals acquire and use the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make work a meaningful, productive, and satisfying part of life (Rojewski, 2006).
5. *Career guidance*: Supports individuals and groups to discover more about work, leisure, and learning, and to consider their place in the world and plan for their futures (Hooley et al., 2023).
6. *Career planning services*: The active provision of information designed to help clients with specific needs (NCDA, 2015, p. 3).

Other terms, such as vocational education and vocational guidance, have been historically used to support individuals in their career development in various counseling and educational settings. There has been an evolution of vocational guidance to career guidance, with earlier forms focused primarily on supporting adolescents and delivered within schools. Career guidance programs, career counseling, and career services involve consideration of the total spectrum of children and adult populations, including retirees (Herr, 2013). The provided definitions are designed to provide a basic understanding of relevant concepts within career development pertaining to mental health support and the provision of counseling.

Career Counseling and Social Change

The counseling profession has a long history of supporting many diverse populations, many with their own specific concerns. Within the helping professions, counseling possesses a unique origin and identity that impacts several aspects of the profession. Since its initial genesis, counseling has evolved significantly. The focus within clinical and scholarly aspects of the profession has shifted based on prevailing elements within broader society and awareness of dimensions of mental health. The importance of work cannot be understated. A quote from the *In-Work Project*, an endeavor aimed at improving the improving of marginalized populations in the labor market and funded by the European Commission, effectively describes the importance of work:

It is not only an indispensable means of enhancing individual senses of usefulness and belonging, but also of providing financial means. Work is also central in several other dimensions, namely in its role as a socialising mechanism, as a source of social exchanges, and individual identities. Thus, work can be seen as the pillar of social organisation, but also, to a large extent, as an important pillar of the existential organisation of individuals. It is a fundamental feature in many dimensions of social integration, such as health, housing, and interpersonal networks. (in-work-project.eu, n.d.)

Career development has historically been a touchpoint for awareness and action in social consciousness and mobility. As societies have evolved, the impact of work on people's lives and well-being has had significant implications. Within the United States, notable events have changed and shaped both career and work, which has provided an enhanced understanding of the centrality of work in people's lives. The aforementioned roots of the counseling profession in the United States involved societal advocacy when Frank Parsons conceptualized career development as involving personal factors and focused on social reform for poor immigrants (Stebbleton & Eggerth, 2012).

Societies evolve with geographic shifts, technological advancements, and significant events and movements. At the heart of many of these changes is career and work. Advancements for marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+, and people of color have been made through occupational access and attainment. Dr. Mark Pope's *Social Transition State Model* (2000) examines the evolution of career and work in the United States. Starting with the 1890s and working up to 2000, he identified various societal events and movements in the U.S. and their implications for career-focused support in service delivery and