

Career Development Applied Theory Paper

Gregory C. Wright, LCPC, NCC

Department of Counselor Education & Family Studies, Liberty University

Author Note

Gregory Cecil Wright

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gregory Cecil Wright.

Email: gcwright@liberty.edu

Dr. Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription & Compromise

Dr. Linda S. Gottfredson developed the Theory of Circumscription & Compromise as a way to view and address children's career development, as well as occupational aspirations, from a sociological viewpoint (Gottfredson, 1981; Helwig, 2001). She was the first one that brought attention to the fact that the environmental/social aspects affect career choices. Several observations inspired Dr. Gottfredson to develop this theory. First of all, she believed that the major psychological theories concerning vocational choice either focused generally on the developmental process or its content but felt that a better integration of these processes, as well as approaches, would be helpful (Gottfredson, 1981). Next, she observed and believed that most theorists either ignored, minimized, or took for granted the important factors of vocational aspirations, such as intelligence, sex, and social class, and felt that the significance of these factors should be able to be discussed systematically (Gottfredson, 1981).

Concerning career development, Dr. Gottfredson noted that the major psychological theories of vocational election were established upon the assumption that people's personal knowledge is used to choose their career, which is indicative of the parallelism between vocational adjustment/satisfaction and the degree of compatibility between the chosen job and self (Gottfredson, 1981). With this in mind, she believed in the importance of a self-concept theory of occupational selection, whereby self-concept was integrated with the process, as well as organizational approaches, social class, and even intelligence (Gottfredson, 1981). She also believed that nonpsychological and psychological approaches, if better integrated, would provide a clearer understanding about the development of vocational aspirations (Gottfredson, 1981).

An important observation that Dr. Gottfredson observed was the gap in literature concerning vocational theory's lack of discussions about the significance of compromise, the compromises that people deal with in their careers, and their coping strategies in dealing with the effects of those compromises (Gottfredson, 1981). She believed that this phenomenon began at an early age and believed that boys and girls learned and perceived at each stage in their cognitive development what was appropriate sexually and contextually (masculinity/femininity & power differentials) and their level of prestige (classism), which ultimately influenced their career choice (Brown & Lent, 2020; Heppner & Jung, 2013). Therefore, she developed this integrated theory to explore how social class (and wealth), gender, and intelligence can affect a child's self-concept, as well as the kinds of compromises that they make, and believed that this occurred in four stages of career development as the child matures cognitively and socially (Brown & Lent, 2020; Gottfredson, 1981; Heppner & Jung, 2013).

Tenets of the Theory

Dr. Gottfredson provided a sociological, as well as a developmental, perspective of career development, which brought attention to how experiences of childhood affect career development and career decision (Brown & Lent, 2020; Gottfredson, 2005). One tenet of this theory pertains to the belief that as children grow they are observing and asking the following question: "Where do I fit in?" (Brown & Lent, 2020; Gottfredson, 2005). Another tenet of this theory pertains to the introduction of vocational self-concept/identity. Self-concept pertains to someone's positive/negative perception of self and can be affected by factors such as gender, social class, intelligence, interests, and values (Gottfredson, 1981).

With this in mind, two main concepts can be pulled from this theory. They are circumscription (self-insight) and compromise. By definition, circumscription is the process of eliminating insulting or unpleasant occupations (occupational alternatives), which conflict with the individual's perception of self (self-concept) due to social class and gender, from future consideration (Gottfredson, 2005; Gottfredson, 1981). Those occupations that are embraced during the process of circumscription are known as the *Zone of Acceptable Alternatives* (social space of occupations). Some of these occupations are rejected for the following reasons: a social position that is too low, a risk of failure that is too extreme, and a perception of being too hard to accomplish with an adequate extent of undertaking (Junk & Armstrong, 2010).

Compromise is defined as the process of changing or relinquishing idealistic career decisions for those considered as more realistic possibilities due to confining elements or pressures (Gottfredson, 2005; Junk & Armstrong, 2010). According to Junk & Armstrong (2010), someone's willingness to compromise on an occupational aspiration is associated with how close that choice is to the essence of the person's self-concept, which is most guarded during the process of compromise. Ultimately, career aspirations are revised, leaving a limited number of occupational possibilities to be chosen.

With these tenets in mind, Dr. Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription & Compromise endorsed the notion that perceived sex appropriateness, power differentials, context, and prestige can affect or constrain an individual's career choice due to that person's view of career appropriateness (Heppner & Jung, 2013; Brown & Lent, 2020). She believed that these factors begin for children at an early age and significantly affect their self-perception and what they

deem as their scope of appropriate alternatives and how/why they make their career choices, which ultimately affect their choice of careers (Heppner & Jung, 2013).

Stages of the Theory

Dr. Gottfredson believed that circumscription could be divided into four stages of development. These stages mirror the cognitive development of children as they move from concrete into analytical thinking. These are the following stages: (1) orientation to size and power (ages 3-5); (2) orientation to sex roles (ages 6-8); (3) orientation to social valuation (ages 9-13); and (4) orientation to the internal, unique self (ages 14+).

Stage 1: Orientation to Size and Power

The first stage, orientation to size and power, occurs from ages 3-5. Several things take place during this stage. They begin to recognize that older and bigger kids, as well as adults, exist and begin to recognize differences in gender (Helwig, 2001).

Stage 2: Orientation to Sex Roles

The second stage, orientation to sex roles, occurs from ages 6-8. This stage consolidates and focuses on the differences in gender roles (gender self-concept) and is an important stage because children recognize the following things: that there are different roles that each gender plays in the world around them and that specific occupations are generally dominated by a specific gender (Gottfredson, 1981; Helwig, 2001).

Stage 3: Orientation to Social Valuation

The third stage, orientation to social valuation, occurs from ages 9- 13. This is an extremely important stage in development for children/adolescents because they begin to develop more abstract concepts of self, as it relates to social class and abilities (Gottfredson, 1981). Children/adolescents also experience the following things in this stage: a keen awareness of the social values that exist amongst their peers, families, and the community; a recognition of the different social values attributed to occupations; and a growing awareness of their internal view of self (feelings) and distinctive abilities, which determines their behavior socially and expectations (Gottfredson, 1981; Helwig, 2001). It is hypothesized that during this stage children begin to rule out (circumscribe and compromise) career choices due to either social class, social class-based situations, or self-concept, as it pertains to intelligence and abilities (Brown & Lent, 2020; Helwig, 2001).

Stage 4: Orientation to the Internal, Unique Self

The fourth stage, orientation to the internal, unique self, occurs from ages 14+. This stage is also known as “the adolescent identity crisis” and produces an awareness with the greatest degree of career consciousness. As each year passes, the maturing youngster’s perception of self continues to develop (internal factors), and the youngster develops an even more critical analysis of occupational compatibility (Gottfredson, 1981). These factors (interests, prestige [social class], and sex type) become the primary determinants for occupational choice; a choice which is congruent with the youngster’s concepts of self (Gottfredson, 1981; Helwig, 2001). Many possible career choices are rejected during this stage, and the individual searches for compatible career fits based upon personal values, current skill set, and likes and/or dislikes.

Conclusion

Dr. Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription & Compromise has extended the profession's ability to discuss more about various populations' career development needs in several ways. Even though Brown & Lent (2020) mentioned that this developmental theory has only had little effect in the counseling field so far, they still endorsed this theory's relevance concerning social class and wealth disparity because Dr. Gottfredson created an awareness to the influence that social learning has on career development. This theory is also relevant in the following ways: advocates and clarifies the significance of representation and why it matters; challenges implicit stereotypes and biases; motivates proactive actions, which can be seen in the reduction of circumscription by enlarging associations (Brown & Lent, 2020; Gottfredson, 2005). Finally, in addition to these aspects, this theory is relevant in bringing focus to the school's position in the lives of their students, who experience financial issues.

Case Study

"Brandy" (pseudonym) is a fourth-grade student at City Springs Public School in a poverty-stricken school district in Baltimore. She comes from a single parent home with her mother, who is a hairstylist and owns her own shop, and two younger brothers. She is an honor roll student, and while her mother supports her education, Brandy reported that she continuously tells her that she wants her to become a hairstylist and to take over her business when she graduates from high school. Brandy shared that she expressed to her mother that she loves math and is not interested in becoming a hairstylist. She shared that her mother responded that she does not have the money for her to go to college and for her to do anything else. Brandy's

teacher encouraged to speak with the school therapist after she broke down in tears after her career day presentation at school. She said that her mother made her do her presentation as a hairstylist.

The Theory of Circumscription & Compromise, including its tenets, would be very beneficial and appropriate in meeting Brandy's career development needs. According to this theory, she would be in stage 3 (ages 9-13), which happens to be orientation to social valuation. Because this is a very important, developmental stage where they are developing more abstract self-concepts socially and ability-wise, it is extremely important to understand how her awareness of social values within her "world" is developing and how she is beginning to circumscribe and compromise career possibilities due to that social class difference, self-concept, and perceived abilities and intelligence level (Brown & Lent, 2020; Gottfredson, 1981; Helwig, 2001).

Brandy expressed that she and her mother and siblings experience some financial issues at times. She might possibly deal with subjective social class issues, which can negatively affect low-income and economically marginalized (LIEM) populations from wanting better vocational and educational opportunities (Brown & Lent, 2020). Poverty and social class issues can make it more difficult for her to go against social norms and negative perceptions. She needs hope and the continuous engagement from the school system, counselors, parents/guardians, and teachers, as well as academic advisors. Helwig (2001) suggested that throughout children's career development their parents are influential either directly or indirectly concerning what occupation

they choose. Therefore, it is important to invest in getting to know Brandy and in learning her thoughts about her authentic career choices.

Concerning circumscription and compromise, another way to address these concepts is to challenge Brandy's social class perceptions by addressing any negative viewpoints and expanding her range of appropriate career considerations (circumscription of alternatives). This can be accomplished through individual, as well as group, therapy. Even though more research needs to be done, this can also possibly be done with introducing her and other students to people, who look like them and who have come from poverty themselves and are successful, even in careers, which do not normally fit the norms of society (Brown & Lent, 2020). According to Falco & Summers (2019), one extremely successful approach has been exposing and broadening girls' viewpoints on sex-role applicability by introducing them to successful women, who are employed in unorthodox careers. This representation can not only help motivate and tear down internal biases for Brandy but can also help other students in her age group to believe that all things are possible, including other career opportunities.

As the therapist working with Brandy, several things would have to continuously be examined, explored, and embraced. They are as follows: a sensitivity to her mental capacity as a fourth grader; multicultural considerations; her view of herself, self-efficacy, barriers, and opportunities; and an honest introspection about personal worldviews and biases as her therapist. Considering multicultural considerations, her background and cultural/socioeconomic/familial expectations must be considered and respected.

Overall, providing Brandy with a safe space to be honest about her developing worldview/feelings, to share the negative stereotypes, to explore other alternatives and possibilities, and to teach her the tools to build herself up is essential. While this theory is considered to be developmental, it has a lot of promise and can be helpful in the field of career development for the various populations. Concerning Brandy, the ultimate goal would be to introduce her to as many other career possibilities in hopes of motivating and inspiring her to move beyond any fears and barriers, which would help to broaden the scope of career opportunities as she develops and matures through the stages proposed by Dr. Gottfredson.

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