

Ch. 11: Social Class and Poverty: A Renewed Focus in Career Development

This chapter seeks to educate or make career counselors more cognizant of the role that a person's social class may play in the career path they pursue or feel pigeonholed into due to an internalized presumption of their perceived reality. Individuals often follow the model of those in their immediate social group. Feelings of expectation indeed apply specifically to a person's social group. The United States does not have an acknowledged caste system, but it seems we may have an unspoken one. This chapter seeks to help the career counselor help their clients see past this perceived barrier to obtaining a job that is atypical for the majority coming from their social group. It is a need for career counselors to be aware of community resources so clients will have access that can help them gain access to every opportunity possible. The writers share that counselors do not need to overlook faith-based organizations that may be able to offer resources other groups may not have access to or even know about.

In some cases, it may be necessary to have a community-based rather than an individualistic approach due to how ingrained an idea is among a specific group. Counselors must be aware of community resources when they must help balance the needs of a person whose job potential and offerings are limited and whose job does not provide the needed benefits. Early childhood and adolescent experiences are likely to affect a person's beliefs about who they are and the career paths that will be appropriate. It can be an essential step for counselors to help younger people increase their outlook and, therefore, help improve their desire and drive to succeed.

Counselors need to have a curiosity about them that can lead clients towards discovering things to help them be motivated to grow or at least develop generalized goals for their future

endeavors. I wonder where the balance is between assisting people to be who they want to be, helping them be who they can be, and being who we want them to be? As counselors who typically see life from a much broader perspective, it seems plausible that we may inadvertently wish to encourage people to excel where we see they have the potential to go rather than accepting their desired destination. The chapter quotes Maree (2015) as saying, “It is the task of every counselor to strive toward empowering clients to transcend their poverty.” When I first read this, it appeared the idea was to push the need to direct clients to believe their family or social class income is insufficient. It is indeed an excellent thought to allow for the possibility of and access to ‘moving on up’ (to quote George Jefferson), but to decide a person should is a whole other idea. Some of the less affluent areas in my community are often more likely to lean on and fellowship with one another regularly—an individual’s motivation matters. As I continued to read, I found Maree did not appear to be pushing income level jumps; instead, she was discussing ways to help persons in lower-income areas opportunities to feel fulfilled through service to their community (i.e., soup kitchen and community garden). This community-mindedness concept made me think about how it would be interesting to see the correlation between life satisfaction levels for self-centered people versus those seeking to serve others. Philippians 2:1-5 gives those living according to the Christian Worldview some guidance on this topic.

When considering the concept of ‘decent work’ versus ‘precarious work,’ I wonder who decides what this looks like for various individuals. It would seem most people’s situations would align with the concept, but others would also choose the work described as precarious. One type of work described as precarious is ‘gig’ work. ‘Gig’ work, etc., can be more lucrative

(due to the flexibility required), which may allow a person who has other responsibilities (e.g., going to school, taking care of an elderly loved one) the opportunity to make some money while also taking care of their duties that do not pay or pay very little. We must consider clients' specific attributes that affect their desire, availability, and potential as we help direct them to resources regarding their career opportunities. Individual circumstances do not align with a one-size-fits-all approach. I appreciated the quote by Krumboltz (2009) indicating counselors should advise clients of the potential social effects of choosing a path that would move them to another social class or income level that may seem unattainable by many in their current group. Investigating the statistics regarding theft in low-income areas versus middle and upper-income level areas would also be intriguing. It comes to mind that the only Wal-Marts I have ever known about being closed were in lower-income communities and were closed due to being unable to control shoplifting.

When teaching master's students, future counselors must be aware that each community, family, and individual is different (likely similar), but the circumstances of each must have individual consideration. It is essential to consider what factors are important in each client's life. Some may need a reality check on the importance of making a living wage, while others may have more important factors to them and their family. It is critical for those working who focus on career counseling to have resources readily available for clients who may have an immediate need for assistance.

Everyone does not have the same value associated with work or gainful employment. An example would be some who live in the homeless population. Some homeless people believe they have a freedom that the rest of us are missing out on, while others in this community are in

despair. Career counselors must allow individuals the autonomy to decide what value they place on such perceived freedom and be willing to accept it. This acceptance will allow the individual to determine and enable the counselor to put their tools to work for someone desirous of assistance.