Vocational Research Priorities

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Almost two decades ago Brayfield (1963) remarked that counseling psychology was the most self-concerned of the helping professions. The recent self-analysis conducted by a task force of the Division of Counseling Psychology (Counseling Psychology: The Next Decade, reported earlier in this issue) is the continuation of the self-concern that has typified Division 17 since its formation within the American Psychological Association. Few years can go by without some sort of public analysis of counseling psychology (e.g., Brayfield, 1963; Carkhuff, 1966; Foreman, 1966; Goldman, 1976; Munley, 1974; Osipow, 1969; Patterson, 1966; Pepinsky, Hill-Frederick, & Epperson, 1978; Schmidt & Pepinsky, 1965; Whiteley, 1980; Whiteley & Fretz, 1980; and an entire issue of *The Counseling Psychologist* in 1979). Whiteley (Note 1) and Pepinsky et al. (1978) review others such as the Greyston Conference in 1963 (Thompson & Super, 1964) and the Bromwoods Conference in 1967 (Whiteley, 1968).

Many of the same issues reappear each time: the merits of laboratory versus field studies, distinctions between counseling and clinical psychology, the quality and quantity of counseling research, professional education and training, and the integration of research and practice. Perhaps because concern has been so consistent, there have been changes in counseling research over the last three decades. A greater percentage of articles in counseling journals are now empirical and their quality has improved. Pepinsky et al. (1978) review other changes as well: sources of research funding, the institutions which account for most of the research and training in counseling, and the growth of research on counseling processes rather than counseling outcomes. After reviewing 12 years of publications in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and the *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, Foreman (1966) concluded that these journals show a "growing similarity to the more traditional psychology journals." One thing that does not appear to change much, however, is the types of issues counseling researchers address. Neither Munley (1974) nor Holcomb and Anderson (1977) found any clear trends in the content of research, the former looking at the years 1954-1972 and the latter the years 1971-1975.

In his contribution to the recent APA Division 17 Task Force symposium, the first point Osipow (Note 2) made was that "the kind of research that we do defines explicitly what we think counseling psychology is . . . . I would propose that it behooves us to be very self-conscious about that definition because whether we like it or not, our colleagues define us by what we write and publish" (p. 3). Because research content has been relatively unchanging over the life of Division 17, it provides a stable de facto definition of the discipline. One reason that content

analyses of counseling articles have appeared periodically in the literature (Holcomb & Anderson, 1977; Munley, 1974; Pepinsky et al., 1978) is to capture and examine the identity of counseling psychology. Given the lack of reaction to the picture that these analyses have painted of the field, it appears that the picture either has been acceptable to most people in the field or for some reason it has not led to any substantial change in the choice of research pursued.

Research content (the specific substantive problems researchers are trying to solve) has received far too little attention in previous debates about the professional identity of counseling psychologists. Although amount and quality of research, third-party payments, the survival of the discipline with an identity separate from that of clinical psychology, and other similar professional issues are certainly legitimate, it sometimes appears to the outsider that the debate on counseling psychology's future is mostly concerned with the well-being of the psychologist rather than the client who is the discipline's *raison d'etre*. If we do not periodically reexamine our research priorities, we run the risk of producing wares that no one finds useful in today's world. This is important to the health of the field because as Pearman (1977) says, "A lack of sensitivity to changing needs and systems may provoke professional genocide."

This paper provides an outsider's view of the research priorities of counseling psychology. As a sociologist, perhaps the mirror I hold up to the field will reflect it in a somewhat different perspective than that in which counseling psychologists are accustomed to viewing it. Although critical, this paper is offered in the spirit of the earlier self-criticism--the desire to create a more effective discipline.

This paper has two general objectives. First, it presents a profile of vocational research and researchers from 1975-1979 and a profile of what vocational researchers say they are interested in for the near future. These profiles provide a starting point for debates about whether this is a "presentation of self" with which the field is satisfied and with which we can expect other segments of society to be satisfied. Second, this paper discusses methods for disrupting the inertia of past research and proposes alternative research priorities for vocational psychology.

Vocational psychology, rather than counseling psychology in general, is the focus of the analysis. The boundaries of the former are clearer and easier to study empirically. Vocational psychology also constitutes a large and important segment of Division 17. Pepinsky et al. (1978) trace the birth of counseling psychology to the need of the Veterans Administration to get World War II veterans back into civilian life. Until 1952 the Division of Counseling Psychology was called "Counseling and Guidance." Although the distinction between clinical and counseling psychology is not a clear one, both groups of psychologists have perceived the counseling psychologist as working with persons who have educational and vocational problems (Brayfield, 1963; Patterson, 1966). Furthermore, vocational psychology largely seems to share the same approach to research as other subspecialties within Division 17.

Specifically, the empirical analysis of this paper looks at past vocational research by cataloging the work pub-

lished from 1975 through 1979 in the two journals that publish the most vocational research (Holcomb & Anderson, 1977), the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (JVB) and the *Vocational Guidance Quarterly* (VGQ). It examines the topics addressed and populations studied. All results are shown separately for the two journals because it is possible that the two journals specialize in somewhat different substantive areas. The topics and samples of this published work provide a basis for identifying the priorities researchers place on different counselor and client needs. These results are compared to those of Holcomb and Anderson (1977), who cataloged the vocational literature in four journals (including the JVB and VGQ) for the years 1971-1975, to see if there has been any marked change in priorities.

One could argue that research priorities have shifted and that the work that will be done tomorrow and that is being done today (and which will not be appearing in the journals for at least another year) reflects priorities different from those of the past five or ten years. Therefore, this article also reports the priorities that the authors of the foregoing articles currently place on different topics. While these past authors will comprise only a subset of future researchers, they are likely to continue to be important contributors to the literature and thereby continue to shape vocational psychology as it is known through published work.

Finally, a profile of authors of the journal articles is drawn. The years since latest degree, type of degree, disciplinary affiliation, and time devoted to research and to counseling are described.

Method

Content Analysis of Journal Articles

A content analysis was done of all articles published in the JVB and of all papers in the "Articles" section of the VGQ from 1975 through 1979. Articles were classified according to major topic (vocational interests, job satisfaction, etc.), type of article (theoretical, review, or empirical), and the sex, race, socioeconomic status, student status, and employment status of people in the samples. A total of 518 articles were analyzed, 331 from the JVB and 187 from the VGQ.

Mail Survey of Journal Authors

Questionnaires were sent to most of the first authors of the journal articles for which a content analysis was done. Seven of the 518 journal articles were eliminated at this stage of the research because they were reprints from other sources and thus not original contributions to the literature. The remaining 511 articles represent 407 first authors. Questionnaires were not sent to the 43 foreign authors, the three corporate authors, or the author of this study, leaving a total of 360 authors to whom questionnaires were mailed. Foreign authors were excluded from the mail survey because this survey of authors was originally conducted to gather information about the uses and problems of U.S. public occupational data in vocational research (Gottfredson, Simonsick, & Voorstad 1981).

The questionnaire was mailed in June, 1980. Of the total 360 authors in the sample, 68% returned usable questionnaires; another 3% replied that they did not fill out the questionnaire because they thought the questionnaire was not relevant to them (because of its emphasis on public data which they said they do not use). One person in the sample had died and the post office returned another 5% of the questionnaires because of no forwarding addresses. (An effort was made to locate every respondent for whom questionnaires were returned, and the 5% refers to those for whom no better address could eventually be found without excessive investment of time.) Most of the remaining 24% of the sample presumably are refusals because the third follow-up was a certified letter containing another copy of the questionnaire and it was not returned by either the respondent or the post office. Non-response rates to the particular questions used in this report were small and are noted in the tables.

The following questions from the survey were analyzed for all respondents: latest degree received, year that degree was received, whether or not the respondent was still enrolled in school, major disciplinary identification (psychologist, counselor, sociologist, etc.), and percentage of time spent in research and in counseling activities. All respondents who replied that they plan to do research on occupations or careers in the near future were asked to mark whether they would place high, moderate, low, or no priority on obtaining various types of information if it were available. That information included 18 topical areas (vocational interests, unemployment problems of individuals, etc.) and six different age groups (ages 0-5, 6-12, etc.). Respondents were also asked to state their preferences for data at the local, state, and regional, versus national level.

Limitations

This paper presents data specifically about vocational researchers and vocational research published in the JVB and the VGQ, and so its results may not be generalizable to all of counseling psychology. But as already noted, vocational research seems to share much in common with counseling psychology in general as well as being important in its own right.

Other investigators might code the content of the journals differently. As shown below, however, this study presents results that are quite similar to those in previous work. Any effect of this investigator's biases about the field was minimized because all coding of journal articles was done by another person. A senior year undergraduate familiar with psychology and majoring in social science did all coding of journal articles into a predefined list of categories. This coding can be considered an informed layman's perceptions of published research in vocational psychology. Furthermore, in the survey of authors it is the researchers themselves who made the judgments about their own research priorities.

Results

Topics of Journal Articles

A major concern in the field has been the number of journal articles that are empirical versus non-empirical.

Of the articles in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 92% were empirical. This is similar to the pattern for more traditional psychology journals (Foreman, 1966; Pepinsky et al., 1978). About 50% of the articles in the *Vocational Guidance Quarterly* were empirical.

The top panel of Table 1 shows the percentage of articles published according to journal and type of article. The JVB accounted for approximately two-thirds of all the articles, and over three-quarters of the empirical articles. About three-quarters of all 518 articles were empirical, with 58.9% of them being empirical articles in the JVB and 18.0% being empirical articles in the VGQ. Most of the reviews and the theoretical (i.e., other non-empirical) articles were published by the VGQ. In terms of broad type of article, then, there do seem to be some differences between the journals.

The rest of Table 1 shows the primary topical emphasis of each type of article; the first column shows the results for all articles combined (these are column percentages). The topics are organized into four broad areas: (1) individual differences among people, such as their interests, aspirations, abilities, and family background; (2) the employment problems that people face, such as getting training, adjusting to a job, and changing jobs; (3) characteristics of the labor market people face, such as what different jobs are like and how many are available; and (4) the design and evaluation of vocational treatments, be they interest assessments or job placement activities. Put another way, these areas are the person, the job environment, the interaction of the two as they are played out in specific developmental tasks and problems, and efforts by counselors to help clients in this process.

Table 1

Primary Emphasis of Articles by Type of Article and Journal in Which it Was Published

Primary Emphasis	Total	Empirical		Theoretical		Review	
		JVB	VGQ	JBV	VGQ	JBV	VGQ
Percentage of articles of each type	100	58.9	18.0	2.7	11.4	2.3	6.8
Individual Differences	*32.5*	*40.1*	*38.9*	*35.6*	*5.1*	*0.0*	*2.9*
Interests, aspirations, values	12.9	16.4	15.1	7.1	1.7	0.0	2.9
Abilities, aptitude, intelligence	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Vocational maturity	8.7	10.2	10.8	21.4	1.7	0.0	0.0
Perceptions of jobs & sex roles	6.8	9.2	6.5	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0
Social class and family influences	3.1	3.3	5.4	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Employment Problems of Individuals	*22.7*	*26.0*	*7.6*	*28.4*	*27.2*	*25.0*	*17.2*
Completing education & training	0.4	0.3	1.1	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0
Job search	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Career commitment	2.1	3.3	0.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Occupational socialization	0.8	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0
Satisfaction	6.0	6.9	1.1	0.0	6.8	0.0	14.3
Adjustment	5.4	4.9	1.1	21.4	10.2	16.7	2.9
Career changes	2.5	2.3	3.2	0.0	3.4	8.3	0.0
Career achievement	4.1	6.6	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Military service	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Retirement	0.4	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Unemployment	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	0.0	0.0
Labor Market Characteristics	*11.1*	*13.4*	*9.7*	*14.2*	*5.1*	*0.0*	*5.8*
Job description & classification	6.4	8.5	4.3	7.1	1.7	0.0	2.9
Employer practices	3.5	3.6	4.3	0.0	3.4	0.0	2.9
Employment patterns & availability	1.2	1.3	1.1	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Design & Evaluation of Treatments	*32.0*	*19.4*	*43.1*	*14.3*	*59.3*	*25.0*	*74.4*
Vocational assessments & treatments	16.8	17.4	19.4	14.3	13.6	25.0	8.6
Education & training programs	1.5	0.7	4.3	0.0	1.7	0.0	2.9
Placement & employment services	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	0.0	2.9
Counseling profession & practices	7.9	1.3	18.3	0.0	22.0	0.0	20.0
Guidance systems	5.2	0.0	1.1	0.0	20.3	0.0	40.0
No Primary Emphasis	*1.7*	*0.3*	*0.0*	*7.1*	*1.7*	*50.0*	*0.0*
Total Number	(518)	(305)	(93)	(14)	(59)	(12)	(35)

Note. JVB = Journal of Vocational Behavior
VGQ = Vocational Guidance Quarterly

The table indicates that individual differences and vocational treatments receive the most attention. Within those two categories, however, there are some interesting patterns. For example, although abilities are extremely important in determining who ends up in and does well in different jobs (1% of articles focused on them), the research interest has been primarily on understanding what people want to do rather than what they may be able to do (e.g., 13%, for interests, aspirations, and values). This also applies to the treatment topic because vocational assessments (16.8%), counselor practices (7.9%,), and guidance systems (5.2%) are given much more attention than are training (1.5%) and placement (0.6%) programs which provide jobs and the skills necessary for them. Although job description (6.4%) has been an active concern, describing the jobs that are actually available (1.2%) and how employers hire for them (3.5%) is less often of interest. Although vocational preferences are undoubtedly important and vocational psychologists have learned much about them, this "wish" or choice approach to career development does not seem to be balanced by a clear focus on the external "reality" factors that may impede or facilitate development. Turning to the fourth category of investigation (employment problems) we see that most work has been on job adjustment (5.4%) and satisfaction (6.0%). Once again, the problems of actually preparing for (0.4%), searching for (0.6%), changing (2.5%), losing (0.4%), and retiring from (0.4%) jobs are largely ignored. Although there are some differences between the two journals and among the three types of articles, they do not change the foregoing impression about a focus on choice rather than reality factors in vocational development.

Table 2 compares the results obtained here for 1975-1979 with those of Holcomb and Anderson (1977) for the years 1971-1975. Their categories were different and they probably coded topics somewhat differently as well. Another difference between the two studies is that they took articles from the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and the *Journal of Employment Counseling* as well as from the JVB and the VGQ, though they did limit their study to articles specifically concerned with vocational or occupational issues rather than counseling in general. Nevertheless, they too show that individual differences account for about half of the articles. Among these articles, vocational interests and preferences were the most popular topics. A greater proportion of articles in 1975-1979 were devoted to employment problems and labor market characteristics. This may show an actual trend, but some portion of the difference undoubtedly reflects differences in coding between the two studies. Holcomb and Anderson did not even have any categories for many of the topics of minor research interest such as job search and unemployment. In addition, topics such as occupational socialization and career commitment were probably coded as individual differences in their study. Neither the Holcomb and Anderson study nor this study found any clear trends across the five-year periods when the years were examined separately, suggesting that the broad topics addressed have not changed much in the last decade. This is consistent with Munley's (1974) conclusion for counseling psychology over the years 1954 to 1972.

Table 2

Comparing the Results of This Study for 1975-1979 With Those of Holcomb and Anderson for 1971-1975

(Percentage)

1971-1975		1975-1979	
Categories	% of Articles	Categories	% of Articles
Individual Differences			
Interests, preferences	19.7	Interests, aspirations, values	12.9
Occupational personality types	6.9		
Goals, aspirations, expectations	4.8		
Values	3.1		
Needs, motivation	5.4		
Aptitudes, intelligence	2.5	Abilities, aptitude, intelligence	1.0
Vocational maturity	6.3	Vocational maturity	8.7
Sex roles, stereotypes	6.3	Perception of jobs & sex roles	6.8
Awareness	0.8		
Social class & family influence	2.5	Social class & family influence	3.1
		(Vocational assessments & treatments)[1]	16.8
Subtotal	*58.3*	Subtotal	*49.3*

Employment Problems

		Completing education & training	0.4
		Job search	0.6
		Career commitment	2.1
		Occupational socialization	0.8
Satisfaction, achievement	10.0	Career achievement	4.1
		Satisfaction	6.0
		Adjustment	5.4
Career mobility	1.1	Career change	2.5
		Military service	0.0
		Retirement	0.4
		Unemployment	0.4
Subtotal	*11.1*	Subtotal	*22.7*

Labor Market Characteristics

Job description, classification	2.9	Job description, classification	6.4
Job status	1.9		
		Employer practices	3.5
Job opportunities	0.4	Employment patterns & availability	1.2
Subtotal	*5.2*	Subtotal	*11.1*

Design & Evaluation of Treatments

Counseling process	11.2	Vocational assessments & treatments[1]	
Program and agency evaluation	8.3	Educational & training programs	1.5
Sources, materials	2.1	Placement & employment services	0.6
		Counseling profession & practices	7.9
		Guidance systems & programs	5.2
Subtotal	*21.6*	Subtotal	*15.2*

[1]Holcomb and Anderson included vocational assessments in their individual differences categories, so the 1975-1979 percentage for "Vocational assessments & treatments" has been added into the "Individual Differences" subheading although it actually belongs under the "Design & Evaluation of Treatments" subheading.

Holcomb and Anderson also note some of the imbalances in the literature mentioned earlier: Very little research is being done with placement and there are surprisingly few studies of aptitudes. They point to other areas that they feel are understudied, such as counseling processes. Although these are the smallest categories in their study, they do not mention the absence of topics that did not even rate a category, such as job search.

Samples Used in Journal Articles

Tables 3 and 4 describe the characteristics of the samples used in the research articles. All but 10 of the empirical articles used persons as the unit of analysis, and the tables include these 388 articles. Table 3 shows the student and employment status of the people in the journal article samples. Students were classified according to type (elementary, secondary, etc.); where more than one type of student was included, the type of mixture is noted (e.g., elementary and secondary). If non-students were included together with students, that is simply noted as a mix of student and non-student. Work status is divided into employed civilians (with specific categories within that group), unemployed, not in the labor force (neither employed nor looking for work), a mixture of the above, and military.

Table 3

Student and Employment Status of Individuals in Journal Article Samples

	Total	JVB	VGQ
Student status			
Student	*56.8*	*57.0*	*56.1*
Preschool	0.8	1.0	0.0
Elementary	1.8	1.7	2.2
Secondary	18.3	15.8	26.4
College	30.7	32.7	24.2
Pre. + Elem.	0.5	0.7	0.0
Elem. + Sec.	2.1	2.4	1.1
Sec. + College	2.6	2.7	2.2
Student + Non-student	7.2	*6.4*	*9.9*
Not student	*34.8*	*35.7*	*31.9*
Not clear	*1.3*	*1.0*	2.2
Work status			
Employed civilians	*32.3*	*32.6*	*30.8*
Counselor	2.1	0.7	6.6
White collar	14.7	15.5	12.1
Blue collar	4.9	5.0	4.4
White + blue collar	10.6	11.4	7.7
Military	*1.3*	*1.7*	*0.0*
Unemployed	*0.8*	*0.3*	2.2
Not in the labor force	*3.1*	*3.4*	2.2
Mixture of employment statuses	7.2	7.4	*6.6*
Not clear	55.4	54.5	58.2
(N)	(388)	(297)	(91)

Note. JVB = Journal of Vocational Behavior
VGQ = Vocational Guidance Quarterly

Over half the studies (56.8%) were of students, most of whom were in college with a smaller proportion being in secondary school. This is consistent with Holcomb and Anderson (1977) and Pepinsky et al. (1978) who also note the predominant use of students, particular college students, in research samples. Although not shown in the table, employment status was rarely recorded for the students. Conversely, if non-students were studied, their employment status was almost always described. Turning to the lower panel of Table 3, we see that counselors themselves were the objects of study in 2% of the studies, which is a smaller proportion than that found by Holcomb and Anderson (5.9%). Of the 45% of the articles in which employment status is discussed, about a third (14.7%) dealt with white collar occupations and another third dealt with either blue collar occupations (4.9%) or a mixture of blue and white collar (10.6%). The 55.4% of articles that did not indicate employment status includes primarily studies dealing with students (data not shown here). In summary, about 55% of the articles studied students (ignoring work status) and about 34% studied workers (usually ignoring student status).

Table 4 shows the race, sex, and social class of the samples used. Where it was clear that more than one sex (or race or social class) was included in the sample, studies were distinguished according to whether or not they analyzed the groups separately; these are referred to, respectively, as "separated" and "mixed" samples. The first thing that is clear is that authors paid more attention to the sex composition of their samples than to race or socioeconomic status (SES) composition, because the percentages of articles in which the sample composition was *not* clear are, respectively, 10.1%, 67.3%, and 64.4%. Nevertheless, over 30% of the studies did not analyze males and females separately (i.e., had "mixed" samples). Where several races or social classes were included, they were more often not distinguished in the analysis than analyzed separately (10.1% versus 5.7%, and 11.3% versus 6.4%,

respectively). Given the important differences which exist between the sexes, races, and social classes, it is unfortunate that in most cases one cannot go back to these studies and figure out just to whom the results generalize. Pepinsky et al. (1978) note that the number of studies not specifying sex has gone down over time. For comparison, in 1966 Foreman expressed dismay that 27% of the samples in his analysis did not specify sex of respondent. However, Goldman (1976) has recently complained that samples or sites are still seldom described in enough detail to know to what settings the results can be generalized. The results

here for race and SES support that complaint. The patterns are largely the same for both journals.

While one could point out that the groups most often clearly specified and studied are the males, the whites, and middle and upper class individuals, the proportions may not differ much from their representation in the working population. One could also argue, however, that the nonwhite, female, and low socioeconomic groups should perhaps receive a disproportionate share of attention because they may suffer a disproportionate number of vocational problems.

Table 4

Sex, Race, and SES of Sample[a] in Empirical Articles, by Journal

(Percentage)

Sample Characteristics	Total	JVB	VGQ
Sex Male	18.3	20.9	9.9
Female	12.4	11.8	14.3
Both (mixed)[b]	31.7	29.6	38.5
Both (separated)[c]	27.6	29.0	23.1
Not clear	10.1	8.8	14.3
Race White	12.4	13.8	7.7
Black	2.6	2.7	2.2
Other	2.1	2.4	1.1
Several (mixed)	10.1	8.8	14.3
Several (separated)	5.7	5.7	5.5
Not clear	67.3	66.7	69.2
SES Low	5.2	4.4	7.7
Middle & upper	12.4	13.8	7.7
Both (mixed)	11.3	11.4	11.0
Both (separated)	6.4	5.4	9.9
Not clear	64.4	64.6	63.7
(N)	(388)	(297)	(91)

Note. JVB = Journal of Vocational Behavior
VGQ = Vocational Guidance Quarterly

[a]Ten empirical articles did not use persons as the unit of analysis so they are excluded here.

[b]"Mixed" means that members from more than one group were included in the study, but they were not separated into the relevant groups for purposes of analysis.

[c]"Separated" means that members from the different groups were analyzed separately.

Holcomb and Anderson also looked at the types of samples examined in the literature, though their coding scheme was quite different. Some of their sample categories resembled the topic categories in this study (e.g., unemployed, retired). They showed that college students receive a lot of attention (22.6% of studies) and workers of various types (9.9% excluding counselors), unemployed (1.9%) and retired (0.2%) populations receive very little. They concluded that "the field of vocational guidance needs to broaden its outlook beyond the school setting in order to better serve different populations including those in school" (p. 344).

Priorities Researchers Place on Different Types of Information

In the mail survey approximately 67% of the authors indicated that they plan to do "research on occupations or careers in the next few years." Those authors were asked, "If you could somehow obtain the type of data you most prefer, what priority would you give to obtaining each of the following types of information?" The list of 18 types of information shown in Table 5 was provided; the items have been rearranged so that they are listed in descending order according to the percentage of authors marking them "high" priority.

Table 5 shows the same pattern of interests as does Table 1 which presented the topics of published articles. Values and attitudes, satisfaction and adjustment, interests and aspirations, and characteristics of occupations and work environments lead the list. The actors who influence a person's career development (the labor market, employer, parents, schools, spouse and children, and community) are at the bottom of the list.

Table 5

Priority Researchers Would Give To Obtaining Different Types of Information If It Were Available

Type of Information	None	Low	Mod	High	(N)
Work related values and attitudes	1.8	8.3	25.6	64.3	(168)
Job satisfaction and adjustment	0.6	11.2	26.6	61.5	(169)
Vocational interests and aspirations	4.7	8.8	28.2	58.2	(170)
Characteristics of occupations and work environments	3.6	16.0	33.7	46.7	(169)
Perceptions and knowledge of occupations	7.1	17.9	33.9	41.1	(168)
Personal abilities and aptitudes	6.5	16.7	39.3	37.5	(168)
Job performance, achievement, and income	3.0	24.4	35.1	37.5	(168)
Socioeconomic and cultural background	4.2	20.2	39.9	35.7	(168)
Job histories	10.1	26.8	29.8	33.3	(168)
Education and training histories	6.5	18.3	39.1	36.1	(169)
Job search	10.1	26.0	32.5	31.4	(169)
Childbearing plans and sex role attitudes	15.3	28.8	24.7	31.2	(170)
Labor market conditions and job availability	10.7	27.8	33.1	28.4	(169)
Characteristics of employers and firms	10.7	33.3	31.5	24.4	(168)
Parental values and childrearing practices	20.8	34.5	25.6	19.0	(168)
Characteristics of schools and training programs	14.0	38.6	26.3	21.1	(171)
Characteristics of spouse and own children	18.3	36.7	27.8	17.2	(169)
Community characteristics	13.3	51.5	21.8	13.3	(165)

Note. Table includes only respondents who plan to do research on occupations and careers in the next few years. Possible N=172.

Table 6

Priority Researchers Would Give To Obtaining Information About Different Age Groups If It Were Available

(Percentage)

		Priority			(N)
Age Groups	None	Low	Moderate	High	
0-5	59.7	29.6	3.1	7.5	(159)
6-12	40.0	31.5	19.4	9.1	(165)
13-18	18.5	19.6	25.0	36.9	(168)
19-24	3.5	4.7	22.4	69.4	(170)
25-34	2.4	5.3	17.2	75.1	(169)
35-54	3.0	10.1	21.3	65.7	(169)
55+	7.2	20.4	34.7	37.7	(167)

Note. Includes only respondents who plan to do research in the near future on occupations or careers. Possible N = 172.

Table 7

Preference for Geographic Area (Level of Aggregation) If Such Data Were Available

Area	% Preferring
Local	21.7
State	10.8
Region (e.g., South)	17.5
Entire U.S.	39.8
More than one[a]	10.2
(N)	(166)

Note. Table includes only respondents who plan to do research on occupations or careers in the near future. Possible N = 172.

[a]Respondents sometimes marked more than one category although they were requested to mark only one.

Table 6 shows preferences for information about different age groups. Most authors have no interest in information about pre-schoolers; most authors have a high interest in people in their prime working years, ages 19-24, 25-34, and 35-54. This focus on working-age individuals is of course consistent with the discipline's interest in people's work. At the same time, however, it is somewhat surprising that more of the tasks and problems associated with career development from age 19 to 55 are not cited as topics of much interest.

When asked to state the geographic level of aggregation they would prefer for their data (Table 7), the greatest number of authors marked "the entire U.S." Half as many marked the area that might be of most interest to the vocational counselor or from which most research samples are probably obtained "local."

Characteristics of Authors

Table 8 shows the major disciplinary identification of the authors. Somewhat over half (53.5%) identified themselves as psychologists, another 8.7% as counselors, and 17.8% as educators. Sociologists (7.5%) and economists (2.1%), though not numerous, together outnumbered the counselors, but both the practitioners and the distant cousins in the field are significant contributors.

Table 9 shows that almost all authors had a doctoral degree in 1980, with half of those with B.A.'s and M.A.'s still being in school. A much greater proportion of the authors were doctoral candidates when the papers were actually written, but it appears that all authors obtain the doctorates even those who identify themselves as counselors. The lower panel of Table 9 shows the year the last degree was received. About 63% of the authors are relatively recent graduates (1971-1980); another 28% graduated between 1961 and 1970.

Table 8

Disciplinary Identification

Discipline	% of Authors
Psychologist	53.5
Counselor	8.7
Educator	17.8
Sociologist	7.5
Economist	2.1
Organizational behavior[a]	3.7
Other[b]	1.7
More than one[c]	5.0
(N)	(241)

Note. Possible N = 257.

[a]Was not an option on the questionnaire, but was frequently written in.

[b]Other write-ins.

[c]Although asked to specify a primary affiliation, some respondents circled more than one response.

Table 9

Type and Year of Latest Degree as of 1980

	% of all authors	(N)	% at that degree level who are still in school
Highest degree			
BA	0.9	(2)	100.0
MA	4.8	(11)	36.4
Ph.D.	84.8	(196)	0.0
Ed.D.	7.8	(18)	0.0
D. Business Adm.	0.9	(2)	0.0
Other	0.9	(2)	0.0
Total	100.0	(231)	

Year of Degree

1935-1950	2.6	(6)
1951-1955	2.6	(6)
1956-1960	2.2	(5)
1961-1965	12.1	(28)
1966-1970	16.4	(38)
1971-1975	43.3	(100)
1976-1980	20.8	(48)
Total	100.0	(231)

Note. Possible N = 257.

Table 10

Percentage of Time Spent in Research and Counseling

	% of Authors	
% Time	Research	Counseling
0	8.7	48.9
1-9	12.2	12.2
10-19	15.7	14.0
20-29	19.2	5.2
30-39	13.1	4.4
40-49	9.6	3.4
50-59	7.9	5-3
60-69	3.4	0.4
70-79	1.8	1.7
80-89	2.1	0.4
90-99	2.2	2.1
100	3.9	1.7
(N)	(229)	(229)

Note. Possible N = 257

Table 10 shows the percentage of time authors typically spend in research and counseling activities. Although more time is spent in research than in counseling (not surprising considering the sample), two-thirds of the authors report spending less than 40% of their time in research. The picture, then, is one in which research is a part-time activity for most researchers. Half the authors do some counseling, though it usually only occupies a small portion of their time. Only 10% of the authors spend more than half their time counseling. This is consistent with Brayfield (1963) who found that 20% of the Division 17 members (a wider group probably less research oriented on the average) reported this level of involvement in counseling.

Conclusions

What Is Wrong With Current Research Priorities?

Counseling psychology was born out of urgent social needs: primarily the need to integrate World War II veterans back into civilian life. Today our nation is facing growing employment problems. Our economy has worsened, bringing with it many problems for current and prospective workers. There have also been ominous trends spanning both good and bad economic times; for example, the unemployment rates among minority youth have been steadily rising and the attachment of adult minority men to the labor force (i.e., being either employed or looking for work) has been steadily decreasing. Many people seem unemployable, though it is not clear what employability really means.

Vocational researchers might be able to provide some counsel on such problems either to individual workers or to policy makers, but the kind of work they do has not changed for many years. Vocational research deals specifically with few of the vocational problems people face and it seems more suited to times of prosperity. When jobs are plentiful, helping people to choose from among them is a valuable activity in terms of both national productivity and personal satisfaction. But when jobs are more scarce, this luxury is increasingly replaced by the more disheartening tasks of coping with forced early retirement, decreased chances of promotion, unemployment itself, or relocating or taking a job for which one is overqualified because nothing else is available. Even in the best of times many jobs are dead-end, uninteresting, or unrewarding. If these are problems with which our society must cope, then these are problems we should debate as research priorities.

Current research priorities could be summarized as "here and now" and "wishful thinking." By "here and now" I mean that research is focused on problems counselors or researchers see in their immediate environment. This usually means the current problems of students in the college in which the researcher is located. Problems of other populations or of that same student population after it leaves the researcher's environment are seldom studied. "Wishful thinking" refers to focusing on personal preferences to the exclusion of environmental and personal constraints. Ivey (1979) discussed this emphasis in a somewhat different way as the "Parsonian error" of which he thinks counseling psychology is guilty. That is, counseling psychology largely ignores the environment side of the person-environment equation, even though this focus on person-environment interactions is one of the defining characteristics of the discipline. Several journal editors (Harmon, 1974, p. 83; Osipow, 1969, p. 18) have also pointed out that the field has been concerned with preference and selection or with vocational maturity when most of mankind appears to have little choice about work. Warnath (1975) has written a particularly scathing indictment of counseling psychology in which he argues that its focus on romantic individualism has blinded the field to the economic and social constraints within which workers must operate.

It is of course legitimate for vocational psychology to specialize in some types of problems and not others. But it should be pointed out that no other division of the APA deals with the sort of problems raised above. Division 14 (Industrial Psychology) is concerned with worker selection and adjustment, but primarily from the employer's and not the employee's point of view. Furthermore, there has apparently been little explicit discussion of research priorities within counseling psychology, and current priorities seem to be pursued as much by default as by design. There are even periodic statements from within the field that vocational researchers often do not do *anything* much of importance.

Back in 1966 Carkhuff maintained that "not enough meaningful questions are asked. The truly critical variables receive the least attention. *In some way, our efforts must translate to human benefits.* We have within our grasp in 1966, the potential for a dynamic surge forward" (p. 476, emphasis in the original). Ten years later Goldman (1976) could still make the same call: "Published research in counseling has, on the whole, been of little value as a base or guide for professional practice . . . . Nothing short of a revolution in research is needed" (pp. 543, 552). Such doleful statements are not limited to the occasional insurgent researcher.

Editors in the field seem to feel the same way. When Berdie (1973) was editor of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* he complained in an editorial of "the failure of this journal to receive papers dealing with so many basic issues and problems in counseling" (p. 394). Osipow, the next editor of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Note 2), repeated that observation and added that "Probably the most common reason for failure [the rejection of manuscripts] that would surprise many a rejected author has to do with how important the manuscript appears to be to the readers" (p. 40). He asks, "How can we teach students and ourselves, for that matter, to function more effectively on the importance and relevance dimensions? . . . . The crux of the problem in counseling research that exists at the present time is finding ways to improve the match between methodology and importance" (p. 44).

Why Don't Priorities Change For The Better? And How Can We Change Them?

What is standing in the way of pursuing more important work? And why do priorities not change as we learn more and face changing conditions? These questions have been discussed by others in terms of the "relevance" and "triviality" of research. I discuss below how current notions of relevance in some ways may be doing a

disservice to research and how the social structure of the discipline (probably of most disciplines) contributes both to triviality of much research and undue stability of research priorities. By pinpointing the problems in the system, perhaps we can counteract some of them.

The relevance of research has been discussed in general terms by many of the people reviewing the state of counseling psychology. Often they are referring to the more specific problem of how to do and present research that counselors can understand and make use of or which eventually will have an effect on practice. This is a different question than "Are vocational researchers doing anything important?" While it is certainly important to do research that can be translated into counseling practice, we should not be limited by the current scope of practice. For example, it is not at all clear that counselors even deal with the populations most in need of their services. To some extent, researchers should be leaders in determining what counselors do and not just technicians helping them to do better what they do now.

Researchers should also be careful to distinguish between the professional issues of practitioners and their own professional issues. If the two become confused it can harm research. For example, Pepinsky et al. (1978) applauded the shift in research from a focus on counseling outcomes to counseling processes, and they commend Osipow for his editorial policy of encouraging process research in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. They applaud this direction partly because it is consistent with the "renewed pressures toward the delineation of practices which the APA can identify and advertise as psychological in nature. Here the declared objective is to standardize further the accreditation of programs and the *licensing of individuals for professional practice*" (p. 496, emphasis added). These pressures arise from the APA because of the possibility that psychologists may become eligible for third-party insurance payments for which physicians and psychiatrists are already eligible.

But researchers should realize that in an effort to capture or protect their share of some market, many occupational groups try to create standards for training and licensure which regulate the range of people practicing their trade. These efforts are furthered by claiming that there is a body of knowledge or set of techniques that takes special training to master. Pepinsky et al.'s (1978) approval of process research is consistent with this effort, as is their wish that counseling psychology represent a "critical kind of craftsmanship--artisanship, if you will--in working with clients" (p. 497). It is not clear that counseling psychologists could justify a claim to special competence were they to stress their skills in dealing with particular problems (e.g., where to find information about jobs, how to look for a job, how to explore one's vocational interests, how to redirect one's career). As Holland (Note 3) pointed out, such practical advice is largely being provided by laymen because of the dearth of materials emanating from counseling psychology. What this all means is that the emphasis on counseling as a special process may be beneficial to the professional status and income of practicing counseling psychologists. However, this process emphasis has no clear relevance to the researcher and may sometimes be a liability. For example, the sources of funding for research and practice are quite different. The researcher often turns to government or foundation grants and contracts. A focus on counseling processes may be self-defeating for the researcher because grants and contracts are often problem oriented.

Whiteley (Note 1) has said that there is insufficient funding of counseling research and that the National Institute of Education, for example, has given "insufficient attention to the research needs of counseling psychology" (p. 10) One might ask, though, whether it is the Institute's or counseling psychology's priorities that are out of step and whose needs are most legitimate.

Government agencies are constantly shifting their priorities as they and the policy-makers above them are held accountable for their use of public funds, and this instability certainly makes it frustrating to maintain a coherent program of research over the years with government funds. But vocational researchers should realize that they too need to justify their activities and at times modify them in order to obtain public funds. And if we attempt to influence NIE's priorities as Whiteley suggests we should, we should be prepared to speak the sponsors' language and not expect them to accept without argument our traditional disciplinary concerns, which on the face of it have little to do with the social problems they have been asked to ameliorate.

The triviality of many research studies is often explained by the competing demands that researchers face. Researchers usually are not able to devote full time to research and they may have few funds to pursue it. The pressure to publish makes it safer to do a small study on a popular topic rather than to do a larger or more innovative project. And encouraging people to do research when they have neither the interest nor the aptitude is also likely to increase the number of trivial studies produced.

These are all important factors affecting the value of research studies, but they still do not explain why the range of topics pursued is so circumscribed. Not that we want them, but trivial studies can be done on any topic. Why do topics change so glacially in the face of more rapid social change? I have already suggested that this stability does not arise by explicit design.

Familiarity and accessibility are the likely culprits, though they are mentioned primarily to explain the types of samples used in studies. Pepinsky et al. (1978), among others, point out that students are most often the subjects of vocational research because they are the most "immediately accessible to graduate students and their professors" (pp. 492-493). Likewise, the training and professional environments of the vocational psychologist tend to reinforce the pursuit of traditional topics because they are the topics that one has heard most about during training, they are the topics that one reads most about in the counseling journals, and they are the topics one's colleagues are most familiar with and knowledgable about. If one never thinks about unemployment, nor reads about it, nor hears one's colleagues discussing it in professional settings, one is less likely to do research on that topic than on one which is part of the zeitgeist of the field. What is familiar in one's environment is easiest to deal with as well as most salient. Gottfredson et al. (1981) argue that such a process is also responsible for the almost exclusive use in vocational research of interview, inventory, or test data as opposed to government-generated data on occupa-

tions and careers, although the latter are often relevant. In short, what is unfamiliar--whether it be a sample population, research design, or research topic--is less salient, less convenient, and seems more costly in time and effort. Pepinsky et al. (1978) briefly discuss how the transmission of a discipline's culture creates apparent stability in editorial policy. In an earlier analysis of the discipline, Schmidt and Pepinsky (1965) also refer to "expediency effects" on the type of research pursued.

The foregoing general phenomenon is not restricted to the research activities of any one discipline. Relying on familiar types and sources of information has also been recognized as restricting the ability of businessmen to obtain information vital to the future health of their organizations.

The problem for a discipline then becomes, how can one disturb this inertia? A few innovators or a few members from other fields or organizational settings would seem to be very important for introducing new information or perspectives into the discipline. Gottfredson et al. (1981) provide evidence that the use of non-traditional data occurs among clusters of individuals rather than more evenly dispersed across the field. This "contagion model" for the introduction of new sources of data is likely the case with new or unfamiliar topics as well. Explicitly exposing work in the discipline to the scrutiny of outsiders also would provide novel feedback and thus might stimulate new lines of research or variations on old ones. Talking to the types of researchers, clients, and practitioners one is *not* likely to run into in the normal course of affairs would also provide a backdrop against which to view one's current or proposed research. More research reviews that survey related research in other disciplines as well as in counseling or vocational psychology (e.g., Garbin & Stover, 1980) would also be useful. In short, a discussion of priorities is important, but unless new information or perspectives are infused into the discussion, priorities may not be seriously challenged nor the alternatives be apparent. Old priorities may only be reshuffled.

There is a disturbing vagueness about what the business of the field is when the identity of counseling psychology is discussed. Despite the considerable number of words written and spoken about the definition of the field, very few give an outsider any idea what substantive topics counseling psychologists are concerned about. Marriage? Finding jobs? Self-actualization? Parenting? All of them? In some discussions there is nary a word about what problems counselors and clients may be dealing with. The impression this leaves an outsider is that all problems are more or less alike when it comes to treating them and it is only the counseling process that is really important. If that is the assumption, it seems unrealistic. There may be common teaching techniques, but one needs to know math to teach math and Spanish to teach Spanish. Even the criticisms about the triviality of research content seldom set forth specific alternatives for researchers.

What is needed, then, are discussions of specific vocational or developmental events or problems. These discussions should assess which of these problems are most common among clients, which ones are most remediable, and which ones should be of highest priority in counseling research. Studies of the counseling process itself have a

place in research, but it is not clear that improving the counseling process itself will make as much practical difference as will better knowledge about specific client problems.

Research priorities should be judged according to two criteria: (1) Is the problem important relative to others? and (2) Will the results of this research make any difference in solving the problem? Discussions about the relevance of research to practice are in effect invoking the second criterion (e.g., Krumboltz, 1968), but the first criterion would seem to be more important. As suggested before, doing research relevant to current counseling does not necessarily mean that one is doing the most useful research.

Osipow (Note 2) concluded that "perhaps the next constructive task is to generate a content oriented 'shopping list' of research needs" (p. 2). The remaining discussion here gives suggestions which would help set research priorities according to the importance criterion. Some of these suggestions incorporate ones made by Osipow (1969). They are also discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Gottfredson, 1981; Gottfredson & Becker, 1981).

1. Identify the problems most common in vocational development, including the ages at which they are most frequent. These problem areas should be concrete problems recognizable to lay people--how to get training, how to find a job, and coping with unemployment--rather than the more abstract problems of "maturity" or "decision making." Research of more practical utility might be generated if researchers were to keep in mind people's own views of what the major vocational problems are that they face. While more general perspectives on career development are important, we should not stray too far from the pressing problems with which people must cope and with which counselors might be called upon to help them cope. Estimates of the incidence of some of the major vocational problems within the population could be obtained from U.S. Bureau of the Census (1977) and U.S. Department of Labor (1980) reports on job search, unemployment rates, job mobility rates, family structure and hours worked, and rates of disability and retirement. Trends for some of these phenomena are shown in the *Employment and Training Reports of the President* (e.g., U.S. Department of Labor, 1980) published each year as well as in other government publications.

2. Identify the populations at greatest risk of facing different problems. It is easy to get the impression that counseling psychology deals only with a limited segment of the population: the college student. If research were to focus on other (perhaps less fortunate) populations, the narrowness of attending primarily to the problems of vocational choice and maturity would be immediately apparent. Initial estimates of the incidence of various problems among different social groups (geographic, racial, sex, age, occupational, industrial, social class, etc.) can also be obtained from the publications mentioned above. In this process of assessing priorities, vocational psychologists probably would also be gathering more detailed information about a

wider range of developmental task and vocational problems than is available now.

3. Investigate the relative importance of various influences on career development and vocational problems. Many theoretical articles (e.g., Super, 1980) clearly lay out the variety of situational as well as personal determinants of vocational development (e.g., socioeconomic organization and conditions, employment practices, school, and community). But as already mentioned, vocational psychologists have focused almost completely on the personal determinants. It would be useful to keep in mind that vocational problems are not entirely internally generated, but are socially structured. Developmental tasks such as choosing aspirations, exploring alternatives, and adjusting to retirement are to a large extent socially programmed not only for *when* they occur but also *how* they should most properly be resolved. Social constraints also differ systematically for different social groups (sex, age, social class, etc.), and it is important to be aware of and investigate these environmental differences.

This paper has reviewed current research priorities in vocational research and argued that they change glacially, if at all, in the face of more rapid and disturbing social changes. Researchers, counselors, and clients would all profit from greater attention in research to the specific vocational problems people face in their lives. Suggestions were provided for how to disrupt the inertia of current research as well as for modified research topics. A debate over these issues among the opinion leaders in counseling psychology could lead to vocational and counseling psychology taking a more central role in psychology, becoming of more interest to people in related fields, and contributing more to the solution of people's vocational problems.

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2. Osipow, S. H. *Task force on scientific needs: Research needs for the 80s.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September, 1980.

3. Holland, J. L. *Counseling psychology--the next decade: Planning for alternative futures.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, September, 1980.

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Footnote