Work-Related Daydreams: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

This study was conducted to develop and examine the work-related daydream construct. The content of undergraduate college students' daydream journals were analyzed using an exploratory qualitative research methodology. The data suggested that the work-related daydream phenomenon was a tangible and accessible process that presented fully developed career narratives. Embedded within these career narratives were elements of individuals vocational self-concepts (i.e., work values, aspirations, life roles, and lifestyle choices). Six work-related daydreams are described in detail. Implications for the use of work-related daydreams as a career assessment technique are discussed.

Keywords

daydreams, self-concept, life roles, career assessment, career narrative

For decades, mental health professionals have utilized mental imagery to create and maintain clients' motivation and to facilitate affective and behavioral change

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(Barth, 1997; Singer, 2006). Within the specific context of career counseling, mental imagery has been used by counselors to assess the interests, to clarify the goals, and to explore the career options of their clients (Chalk, Meara, Day, & Davis, 2005; Heppner, O'Brien, Hinkelman, & Humphrey, 1994; Skovholt, Morgan, & Negron-Cunningham, 1989). Daydreaming, as a specific type of mental imagery process, however, has not been considered as a significant subject within the counseling literature (Raphling, 1996). We contend that the daydreaming process has the potential to serve as a unique and effective technique for gaining insight into individuals' work-related goals and values in a contextually detailed manner that is often missing in traditional quantitative approaches to career assessment.

William James was perhaps the first social scientist to allude to what is now referred to as daydreaming. In his seminal work *The Principles of Psychology*, James (1890/1950) depicted a predominant aspect of our stream of consciousness to be moments of absorption in fantasies and narratives during which time we engage in relatively little meta-cognition. Building on the work of James, pioneering daydream researcher Jerome Singer (1981) proposed that "daydreaming represents a shift of attention ... away from directly looking at or listening to something in the external environment, toward an unfolding sequence of private responses ... 'pictures' in the mind's eye" (p. 3). More specifically, daydreaming is a process in which an individual spontaneously develops a train of thought regarding past, present, or future events, often accompanied by vivid mental imagery, without conscious attention to an immediate stimulus or cognitive task (Singer, 1981).

The act of daydreaming is a widespread phenomenon among healthy and well-adjusted adults, consuming between 30% and 50% of individuals' mental activity (Klinger & Cox, 1987). Daydreaming is such a common occurrence that individuals usually pay little attention to the act of daydreaming or the content of their daydreams (Klinger, 1987). Yet, the extent to which daydreaming occurs suggests that it is an important human experience. Research indicates that as much as 65% of individuals' daydreams are related to current life concerns (Klinger, 1990). The high saliency of the role of work in American society (Blustein, 2006) suggests that individuals do daydream about work-related issues. Applying criteria from the aforementioned scholars, a work-related daydream in this study will be defined as a spontaneous and developing stream of thought away from one's immediate attention, including mental images and/or inner monologues that position the individual in his/her work role in the past, present, or future.

The concept of a person's career as a developing and ongoing narrative is an emerging approach within the career counseling and development literature (Brott, 2005; Christensen & Johnston, 2003; Cochran, 1997). Rooted in a constructivist position, the narrative approach to career counseling suggests that individuals are engaged in a continuing process of creating subjective stories. These stories are often laden with information about one's sense of self, and one's experiences as they relate to one's vocational realm of life. They become a means of articulating the meaning one makes from his or her personal experiences in terms of one's work life (Bujold,

2004; Savickas, 1993). From this perspective, daydreams can be viewed as personal narratives that have the potential to highlight a person's aspirations, motivations, identity, and values regarding their present or future working life.

There are several constructs within career development literature that are suggestive of, or similar to work-related daydreams. Therefore, it is important to examine how our construct of daydreams is distinct from these constructs, and how it can potentially enrich the career development literature beyond these constructs. *Occupational daydreams*, first proposed by Holland (1972), has appeared periodically in vocational literature since the 1970s (Gottfredson & Holland, 1975; Miller, Springer, Tobacyk, & Wells, 2004; Yanico, 1981). The term was incorporated into the widely used self-directed search (SDS; Holland, 1972). The occupational daydreams section of the SDS asks individuals to make a list of the occupations they have considered. Therefore, the construct is similar, if not identical, to other terms such as occupational preference and occupational choice (Johnson, 1995). In fact, in each of the studies examining occupational daydreams, the term is narrowly defined as a stated occupational preference. Researchers do not purport that occupational daydreams are comprised of mental images, nor do they claim that they incorporate a spontaneous or developed train of thought.

Occupational possible selves, first proposed by Robinson, Davis, and Meara (2003) are defined as individuals' self-conceptions specifically related to one's occupational hopes, expectations, and fear. This construct is derived from the concept of possible selves, which according to Markus and Nurius (1986) are conceptions (i.e., thoughts, ideas, images) of one's self in the future. Although occupational possible selves are conceptually similar to work-related daydreams, they differ in that possible selves are not defined as streams of thought but rather more narrowly as schema (i.e., thought structures or concepts). Consequently, researchers have operationalized it similarly to that of occupational daydreams. For example, in one study that examined the occupational possible selves of college women, Chalk, Meara, Day, and Davis (2005) asked participants to list the names of occupations they most hoped to obtain, and those they most feared obtaining. Thus, the construct has not elicited contextual depth or detail beyond occupational titles. We believe the daydreaming phenomenon has the potential to do so.

For the purpose of the current study, the theoretical foundation for exploring the content of daydreams resides in several assumptions common to vocational development literature emphasizing the self-concept. Most notably, Super (1963) contended that "the concept of self is generally a *picture of the self* in some role, some situation, in a position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships" (p. 18). These pictures of the self (i.e., mental images) embody relevant and accessible details of one's self-attributes that can illuminate vocational proclivities. Among these attributes are personality traits, values, interests, and aspirations (Gottfredson, 1981; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Super (1963) referred to the constellation of these attributes as the *vocational self-concept*, and contended that values in particular, were salient components of one's vocational self-concept and critical variables in the career

choice process (Super, 1963; Super et al., 1996). Moreover, Brown and Crace (2002) state that values represent beliefs that guide our career decisions and indicate our desires regarding work. Therefore, work values will be the initial focal point of our exploration, as we assume they are prominent aspects of one's imagined sense of self.

Aside from self-descriptive details, Super (1963) noted that self-concepts have a self-evaluative characteristic (i.e., self-esteem), suggesting the presence of affective details. This is congruent with Klinger's assertion that daydreams often include emotional elements (Klinger, 1987). Super (1963) also stated that individuals have numerous distinct self-concepts which depict the self in different life roles. These roles, in turn, are dynamic and interact with each other in characteristic fashions (e.g., complimentary, conflicting; Super et al., 1996). The sum of these roles and role interactions are referred to as the self-concept system.

Purpose of the Study

Based on Super's assumptions, we were interested in investigating the following questions: Is the work-related daydream a tangible and accessible phenomenon? How are work-related daydreams reflective of an individual's vocational self-concept? More specifically, are work values depicted by an individual's work-related daydreams? How do work-related daydreams reflect an individual's self-concept system, that is, the complex interplay between one's various self-concepts? Conducting this empirical examination can highlight practical applications of the daydreaming phenomena in the career counseling process, while providing counselors information for making informed inferences regarding individuals' daydreams. For example, daydreams may provide vivid details of individuals' vocational self-concept, self-concept system, and vocational choice process which Super (1996) stated was a process of implementing a self-concept, during which individuals are often "daydreaming about possible selves they may construct" (p. 132). It can also clarify the construct of daydreaming, thus providing a foundation for future examinations which may deepen our understanding of the potential uses of daydreams in career counseling.

Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology grounded in a post-positivistic paradigm. Our assumption was that individuals experience a common phenomenon described earlier in this article as a work-related daydream. We were particularly interested in describing the details of this phenomenon. However, we recognized that our paradigm suggests that such a phenomenon can only be observed as a contextually influenced approximation of individuals' reality (Ponterotto, 2005). To this end, we developed an explorative approach that integrated two existing qualitative methods: directed qualitative content analysis and consensual qualitative research (CQR). Both methods are located in a post-positivist research paradigm. Directed qualitative content analysis is a research method for subjectively interpreting

text-based data by systematically identifying, classifying, and coding themes and patterns within the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It differs from conventional qualitative approaches (e.g., grounded theory) in that it is a more structured and limited approach. The researcher is guided by existing theory, or prior research, employing a deductive process initially, in an effort to describe a phenomenon, develop a concept, or build a model (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Our rationale for using a directed approach was based on our research questions, which were generated from preexisting career development theories (Super et al., 1996). Our aim was specifically to explore, identify, and describe vocationally relevant self-attributes within the context of one's daydreams.

CQR is a qualitative approach that emphasizes a process by which multiple researchers arrive at consensus judgments about the meaning of narrative data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). An essential component of CQR is the use of auditors to check the work of primary judges in an effort to arrive at a faithful representation of participants experiences. Similar to most qualitative approaches, CQR can be useful in providing highly descriptive data which highlight the participants' experiences, while the consensual aspect of the approach potentially adds to the trustworthiness of the study (Hill et al., 1997).

Participants

The participants were 46 undergraduate college students enrolled in one of three sections of a course titled *Life Skills for College and Beyond* at a large research university in the southeastern United States. Course credit was not granted for participating, as the researchers did not want to offer students incentive for creating a phenomenon that did not naturally occur. However, the opportunity to analyze any work-related daydream as an in-class activity was offered to each student. The students included 20 men and 26 women who ranged in age from 18 to 23 ($M = 19.9$, $SD = 2.29$). The participants in the study included 34 Caucasians, 7 African Americans, 3 Arab Americans, and 2 Latino Americans. Twenty-eight college majors were represented within the sample. Five participants were undecided.

Research Team

The research team consisted of two judges and two auditors. The two judges included the first and second authors, who are both Caucasian male college faculty members with academic and professional backgrounds in counseling. The judges also maintain scholarly interests in career counseling and the career development of college students. Both of the auditors were female doctoral students studying counseling psychology at a large research university in the southeastern United States. One auditor was a Caucasian in the first year of her doctoral program. The other auditor was a Chinese American in the third year of her doctoral program. In accordance with the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), the two judges addressed researcher biases by discussing their beliefs, theoretical perspectives, and values,

and how these created any possible expectations they harbored regarding the potential findings of the study. Research bias was also addressed through the consensus achieving process inherent in the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997).

Data-Gathering Methods

Demographic information. Participants completed a questionnaire designed to obtain information regarding their age, gender, ethnicity, Grade Point Average (GPA), academic major, and academic standing in college in terms of credit completion.

Daydream journal. Participants' work-related daydreams were obtained using daydream journals, which were derived from the daydream questionnaire (Langens & Schmalt, 2002). Daydream journals consisted of five-lined entry spaces, two pages per entry, in which participants could record their daydreams in writing. A definition of work-related daydreams is also included on the first page of the journal. Directions on how to record daydreams are located on the top of the second page and are stated as follows: *provide a written record of your daydreams that include images of your past, present, or future careers, work settings, and/or daily work life. Record your daydream in your journal as soon after the daydream ends as possible. Please attempt to record up to five daydreams during the next three weeks. Please attempt to record as much detail about your daydreams as possible.*

Procedures

Data collection. Prior to any data collection, the research procedures were approved by the institutional review board at the university where this research project took place. At the time of data collection, the lead researcher explained the purpose of the study, the potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Informed consent was obtained from those who chose to participate. The lead researcher gave a 7-min presentation that included a brief synopsis of the theoretical tenets of daydreaming, a definition of work-related daydreams, and the procedures for recording daydreams. It was stated clearly that although research suggests that daydreaming is a common phenomenon, no research has examined whether work-related daydreams exist. Daydream journals were then distributed to each student. Researchers suggested the participants carry their journals throughout the day, as research suggests that daydreams occur spontaneously during moments of relative mental inactivity (Singer, 1981). The students were informed that the journals would be collected in 3 weeks.

Data analysis.. The judges adopted operational definitions of 14 values which comprise the Life Values Inventory (LVI; Brown & Crace, 2002), and two life role interactions as depicted by Super, Savickas, and Super (1996). These definitions served as a "start list" of codes. The LVI purports to measure 14 values that guide

behavior and that are salient across various life roles via 42 questions. The LVI was chosen because, as previously stated, values represent an important aspect of the self-concept (Super et al., 1996), and the LVI depicts values that are salient across multiple life domains. The judges then independently reviewed all the daydream journals. Using an open-coding technique, the judges highlighted text that appeared to describe the values and life role interactions. Each journal entry was treated as a whole. Text that could not be coded using one of the predetermined definitions was coded, by each judge individually, with another label that captured the essence of the text as it related to the vocational self-concept (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Next, the judges met with each other to compare and discuss their findings. Following the CQR (Hill et al., 1997) approach, the judges integrated their findings and came to a consensus about overarching themes and a comprehensive coding scheme. The findings were then presented to the auditors who evaluated the clarity of the coding system. The auditors reported inconsistencies in coding decisions and confusion with the coding scheme. Based on the auditors' feedback, the judges engaged in another collaborative process to revise the coding scheme. During this iteration, the judges sought to compare, contrast, discard, and refine the codes to arrive at overarching categories that best explained the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categories were then grouped into general domains. The findings were once again presented to the auditors who offered more feedback and clarification. This feedback guided the judges as they engaged in a third collaborative iteration to refine the coding scheme. The process then concluded based on a sense of "data saturation."

Results

The total number of daydream journal entries recorded by each participant during the 3-week period ranged from 0 to 5. The participants recorded an average of three daydreams. Five daydream entries had no content related to work, and thus they were not analyzed. Two participants claimed not to have experienced any work-related daydreams. A total of 171 daydream journal entries were analyzed. Thirty-eight categories and 18 subcategories emerged from the data. These categories were grouped into eight domains: work self-concept, work environment, description of work, work task perception, career perception, view of lifestyle, emotional reactions, and life role considerations. Definitions of the domains are presented in Table 1. Categories and subcategories are available upon request from the author. Specific categories often occurred multiple times within a journal entry. However, for the purposes of reporting the representativeness of the categories, a specific category was only counted once per participant. For example, a participant may have had a specific category represented in each of their daydream journal entries; however, the category was only counted once. The frequencies in which each category and subcategory occurred by participant is presented in Table 2. A category noted by 31–46 participants was called *general*. A category noted by 15–30 participants was called

Table 1. Category and Subcategory Frequencies.

Domain	Definition
Work self-concept	The perception a person has of himself or herself, or the way a person would like to see himself or herself in the context of the role work.
Work environment	The description of the physical and social aspects of one's work setting including décor and location.
Description of work	The specific psychological and structural aspects of the work one has engaged in, is engaging in, or would like to engage in.
Work task perceptions	Perceptions of the nature, duties, and operations of a specific job.
Career perceptions	Statements or images that describe one's beliefs about careers and/or how careers develop, and/or the meaning of work.
View of lifestyle	A description of the way a person lives, where a person lives, their home environment and socioeconomic position in society as depicted by their home life or occupational life.
Emotional reactions to work	Positive or negative expressed emotional reaction to work.
Life role consideration	A depiction of life roles outside of work, peripheral to work, or of life roles that interact with the role of work.

frequent. A category noted by 4–14 participants was called *occasional.* Categories noted by fewer than 4 participants were not included in the final results.

To capture the essence of the daydream phenomenon and to maintain the coherence and vividness of the participants' voice within each daydream, we provide six daydream journal entries in their entirety. We then sequentially identify sections of the daydream entries that contain categories or subcategories. These six daydreams were chosen because combined, they offer examples of all the general and frequent reported categories and/or subcategories. These categories and subcategories span all eight domains identified by the researchers. Italicized words represent categories or subcategories.

Daydream 1

The following daydream was reported by a 20-year-old female who identified her race as Caucasian. She was a sophomore, and her stated major was accounting.

It is 2 o'clock on a Tuesday and I am in my introduction to anthropology class. I drift off. I am in a cozy house in a suburban neighborhood. I am sitting at my desk, which is in a small nook of the house. I look out the window next to me on to the well-groomed front yard. My two daughters are outside playing with our new puppy. My husband is sitting on the front porch reading the paper. I am doing some work at my desk. I feel complete and happy because I have managed to balance my family with my work.

Table 2. Category and Subcategory Frequencies.

Domain	Category	Subcategory	Representativeness	Number of Cases
Work self-concept				
	Daydream phenomenon		General	34
	Concern for others		Frequent	19
	Career apparel		Frequent	18
	Responsibility		Occasional	14
	Creativity		Occasional	13
	Importance		Occasional	13
	Fame		Occasional	7
	Altruism		Occasional	4
	Objective analysis		Occasional	4
	Career confidence		Occasional	4
	Career certainty		Occasional	4
Work environment				
	Physical location		General	32
		Cosmopolitan	Frequent	16
		Abroad	Occasional	12
		Adventure/outdoors	Occasional	11
		Rural	Occasional	8
		Home	Occasional	5
		Suburban	Occasional	4
	Physical description		Frequent	22
	Social relationships		Frequent	22
Description of work				
	Psychological feel		Frequent	24
	Work recognition		Frequent	15
	Work structure		Frequent	15
Work task perceptions				
	Task accomplishment		Frequent	20
	Independence		Frequent	10
	Realistic occupational expectations		Occasional	8
	Unrealistic occupational expectations		Occasional	5
Career perceptions				
	Career achievement		Occasional	13
	Fantasy		Occasional	10
	Career development trajectory		Occasional	9
	Dream job		Occasional	5
	Vocation		Occasional	4

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Domain	Category	Subcategory	Representativeness	Number of Cases
View of lifestyle				
	Occupational prestige		Frequent	17
	Financial prosperity		Frequent	15
	Home environment		Occasional	11
		Cosmopolitan	Occasional	6
		Suburban	Occasional	4
		Rural	Occasional	4
	Health and activity		Occasional	7
Emotional reactions to work				
	Job satisfaction		Frequent	28
	Work engagement		Frequent	17
	Life satisfaction		Occasional	12
	General positive response		Occasional	7
	General negative response		Occasional	7
	Antipathy		Occasional	4
Life role considerations				
	Family roles		Frequent	24
		Role of wife	Occasional	11
		Role of mother	Occasional	11
		Role of husband	Occasional	7
		Role of father	Occasional	7
		Role of family member	Occasional	5
	Leisure role		Occasional	7
	Life role interactions		Frequent	20
		Life role interaction (conflicting)	Occasional	9
		Life role interaction (integrated)	Occasional	9
		Life role interaction (complimentary)	Occasional	8
		Life role demarcation	Occasional	6

Suddenly, I wake up to find I am not in this wonderful place, but instead still in my small, windowless anthropology classroom.

This daydream begins with a description of the generally reported category within the work self-concept domain: *Daydream Phenomenon*. "It is 2 o'clock on a Tuesday and I am in my introduction to anthropology class. I drift off." The daydream

continues with a reference to two frequently noted categories within the work environment domain: the *physical location* in which the participant performs her work, and a *physical description* of the work setting. "I am in a cozy house in a suburban neighborhood. I am sitting at my desk, which is in a small nook of the house. I look out the window next to me on to the well groomed front yard." As the daydream progresses, references are made to three occasionally noted categories within the life role consideration domain: *role of wife*, *role of mother*, and *integrated life role interaction*. "My two daughters are outside playing with our new puppy. My husband is sitting on the front porch reading the paper. I am doing some work at my desk." The daydream concludes with an implication of *life satisfaction*, which was an occasionally reported category in the emotional reaction domain. "I feel complete and happy because I have managed to balance my family with my work."

Daydream 2

This daydream was reported by a 19-year-old female who identified her race as Caucasian. She was a freshman, and her reported major was accounting.

> I work in a medium-sized business. It's busy enough to be exciting, but small enough to not be distracting. I'm comfortable in my setting. I love my big desk. It's neat and organized. I know where everything is at all times. I have one junk drawer. It helps me feel at home. There are so many different tasks involved in accounting that it's never really repetitive, especially since names and numbers are constantly changing. It keeps me focused. I get engrossed in the numbers and making everything balance. I love problem solving and making every detail connect to the final outcome. It's satisfying. It makes me feel like I truly found my calling. I take pride in my work, because the owners take pride in the business that produces my work. I know everyone at my work on a personal basis. It's like working with a family.

The beginning of this daydream depicts the *psychological feel* of the work environment, which was a frequently noted category in the description of work domain. "It's busy enough to be exciting, but small enough to not be distracting. I'm comfortable in my setting." She also gives a detailed *physical description*. "I love my big desk. It's neat and organized. I know where everything is at all times. I have one junk drawer. It helps me feel at home." The participant then describes another frequently noted category in the description of work domain: the *work structure*, specifically mentioning the varied nature of her work. "There are so many different tasks involved in accounting that it's never really repetitive, especially since names and numbers are constantly changing." As the daydream continues, the participant mentions an occasionally noted work task, *objective analysis*, and two frequently noted categories within the emotional reactions domain: *work engagement* and *job satisfaction*. "I get engrossed in the numbers and making everything balance. I love problem solving and making every detail connect to the final outcome. It's

satisfying.'' The participant then implies that her work has meaning beyond the work itself, which was coded as *vocation*, and placed in the career perceptions domain. ''It makes me feel like I truly found my calling.'' This is followed by a frequently noted category within the work self-concept domain: *concern for others*. ''Knowing that my job helps the owner of this smaller business is rewarding also.'' The daydream concludes with a depiction of *social relationships* within the work environment which was a frequently noted category within the work environment domain. ''I know everyone at my work on a personal basis. It's like working with a family.''

Daydream 3

This daydream was reported by a 22-year-old female who identified her race as African American. She was a senior, and her stated major was pre-med.

> I was sitting on the bus looking through the window when I began wandering off. I came down the stairs with my briefcase in my hand. My oldest child asked me, ''when are you coming back home mommy?'' ''Don't worry. I will be back on time this time, I promise.'' I gave him a kiss and off I went to work. Dr . . . .you are needed in the emergency room. I walked as fast as I could into the emergency room. There I saw a little girl on the bed with her mother sitting next to her crying. I immediately got to work. After checking everything, I requested that she be taken to surgery as soon as possible.

As in daydream 1, the participant describes the *daydream phenomenon*. Explicit reference is then made to the *role of mother*, and the ensuing dialogue between the participant and her son implies the occasionally noted category of *conflicting life role interaction*. ''When are you coming back home mommy?'' Don't worry. I will be back on time this time, I promise.'' The participant then describes a level of *importance* she perceives herself as having in her work. ''Dr . . . you are needed in the emergency room . . . . I requested that she be taken to surgery as soon as possible.'' This was an occasionally noted category within the work self-concept domain.

Daydream 4

This daydream was reported by a 19-year-old male who identified his race as Caucasian. He was a freshman in college, and his stated major was undecided.

> I am sitting on an airplane flying to a golf tournament. The only thing that I can think about is how it would be such a dream if I could be doing this for a living. Traveling to the greatest places in the world, playing the game I love and getting paid to do it. I am sponsored by Ping clubs, while getting gloves, balls and shoes from Titleist. I would get clothes from Polo. I am traveling every week with my wife on the PGA Tour and playing great golf. I am traveling to my first Masters at Augusta National on my private plane. This is my dream job.

The daydream begins with the general *daydream phenomenon*. Embedded within the depiction of this phenomenon is the *physical location* in which the participant would like to perform his work (i.e., outdoors). As the daydream continues, the participant describes a high level of *occupational prestige* in his work. "I am sponsored by Ping clubs, while getting gloves, balls and shoes from Titleiest. I would get clothes from Polo." This was a frequently noted category within the view of lifestyle domain. The participant then mentions the occasionally noted category of *role of husband*, and a sense of *career achievement*. "I am traveling every week with my wife on the PGA Tour and I am playing great golf." Career achievement was a frequently mentioned category within the career perceptions domain. Finally, the participant expresses the *financial prosperity* his work brings him, and the explicit statement that this is his *dream job*. "I am traveling to my first Masters at Augusta National on my private plane. This is my dream job." Financial prosperity was a frequent category within the view of lifestyle domain, while dream job was an occasional category within the career perceptions domain.

Daydream 5

This daydream was reported by a 21-year-old female who was a senior in college and identified her race as Caucasian. Her stated major was psychology.

> I own a small bakeshop in the middle of Hudson, Ohio. The store is located on Main Street and is colorfully painted and decorated to mimic a gingerbread house. I started the business right after graduating from a premier culinary arts school. I now own the shop and work alongside my mom, sister, daughter, and nieces. The shop, Marsha's Mini-Masterpieces specializes in gourmet cupcakes. As the owner, I am free to set my own schedule. Also, I am responsible for dealing with the growth and development aspects of the company. Bi-annually my mom, sister, and I head to NYC to a girl's trip/pastry conference. We have a blast trying all the latest creations and garnering ideas for menu additions. I feel elated to be in a career I control, surrounded by friends and family. I specialize in baking little pockets of comfort food.

The participant begins this daydream by mentioning the suburban *physical location* where she performs her work and gives a brief *physical description* of her work place. "The store is located on Main Street, and is colorfully painted and decorated to mimic a gingerbread house." She then mentions specific *family member* roles, as well as *integrated life roles* (i.e., family member and worker). "I now own the shop and work alongside my mom, sister, daughter, and nieces." As the dream progresses, the participant describes the *independence* her work offers her, and a level of *responsibility* she perceives herself as having at work. Both of these categories were occasionally mentioned and placed in the work self-concept domain. "As the owner, I am free to set my own schedule. Also, I am responsible for dealing with the growth and development aspects of the company." The participant then expresses *creativity*

applied to her work. "We have a blast trying all the latest creations and garnering ideas for menu additions." Creativity was a frequently mentioned category within the work self-concept domain. Lastly, the participant expresses a statement of job satisfaction. "I feel elated to be in a career I control, surrounded by friends and family."

Daydream 6

This daydream was reported by a 20–year-old female who identified her race as African American. She was a sophomore, and her stated major was finance.

> I'm sitting in my econ class, spaced out as usual. I feel my head rushing. My adrenaline is pumping and I'm definitely hyped. The crowd pumps me up even more. I look over at the other dancers and we smile confidently. We know we're about to perform the best show we've done so far. The lights flicker and I'm ready. The song cues, and the stage lights up. The crowd goes wild. The beat drops and I begin to dance. I'm killing the routine. We're all killing it. My adrenaline is rushing even more. I feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead. It doesn't matter though. I'm nowhere near tired and I live being on stage. I love being on tour. Dance is my escape. Two hours later, the concert is over. Time to head backstage, meet and greet fans and relax. I snap back into reality.

Once again the *daydream phenomenon* occurs at the beginning of the journal entry. The participant then mentions aspects of *fame* and *recognition*. "The song cues, and the stage lights up. The crowd goes wild." Fame was an occasional category within the work self-concept domain, while recognition was a frequent category within the description of work domain. She then mentions *task accomplishment*, which was a frequent category within the work task perception domain. "I'm killing the routine. We're all killing it." This is followed by expressions of *work engagement*, and *health and activity*. "My adrenaline is rushing even more. I feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead. It doesn't matter though. I'm nowhere near tired and I live being on stage." Health and activity was an occasional category within the work self-concept domain. Finally, she expresses feelings of *job satisfaction*. "I love being on tour. Dance is my escape."

The only category that emerged from the data frequently that was not mentioned in the aforementioned daydreams was *career apparel*, which was placed in the work self-concept domain. Eighteen participants gave detailed descriptions of their attire in the context of the work role. These descriptions were generally short. For example one participant noted, "I am dressed in black pants with a white shirt and red tie," while another wrote, "I see myself in my white doctor's coat."

Discussion

The results of this study give credence to a potentially powerful qualitative career assessment technique that is grounded in vocational self-concept theory (Super,

1963, Super et al., 1996) and the constructivist paradigm within the career literature (Bujold, 2004; Savickas, 1993). The scope of this study was limited to exploring and describing the content in work-related daydreams. However, we comment on some of the important implications for practice illuminated by these results.

Research question one explored whether work-related daydreams are a tangible and accessible phenomenon. The results of this investigation suggest that work-related daydreams did occur for these participants. Certainly, the fact that most participants reported work-related daydreams can be considered self-evident as they were asked to do so, although two participants claimed not to have experienced them. However, it is the *daydream phenomenon*, the most commonly coded theme to emerge from the data, which suggests the tangibility of the phenomenon. Participants frequently described a process of "drifting off," and/or "wandering off" from a conscious cognitive activity (e.g., often lectures) without being prompted. They also suggested mental imagery by repeatedly referring to the daydreaming process as "picturing myself in my mind." The congruency between participants' descriptions of the daydreaming process and the definition of the daydreaming phenomenon proposed by us and other scholars (Klinger, 1987; Singer, 1981), we believe, offers credibility to the construct.

Our definition of work-related daydreams includes those "trains of thought that position the individual in the role of work in the past, present, or future." All but three of the participants' journal entries were future oriented. The preponderance of future-oriented daydreams may also give credibility to the construct. The act of career planning is fundamentally about a person's representation of the future (Cochran, 1997). This may be especially true for individuals with little to no formal career experience. The participants in this study (i.e., traditional-age college students) are theoretically entrenched in an exploratory stage of their career development (Super et al., 1996). They are actively exploring their environments and themselves, behaviorally and cognitively, to seek out relevant information that can be applied to future career decisions.

Research question two explored how work-related daydreams are reflective of individuals' vocational self-concepts. Nine of the 14 original start codes (i.e., values from the LVI; Brown & Crace, 2002) emerged from the data. An additional six subcategories emerged that described either an individual's self-image or a self-attribute in the context of work. These elements of one's self are indicative of Super's (1963) *simple self-concept*, which are impressions of the self with some accrued meaning (i.e., "I'm someone who likes to help people"). The most frequent of these categories were *concern for others* often referred to as an altruistic or a social value, *creativity* usually referred to as an intrinsic value, and *financial prosperity* and *occupational prestige* which are traditionally considered external work values (Marini, Fan, Finley, & Beutel, 1996). The variety of categories reflective of work values support previous research which suggests that young adults tend to view numerous and various outcomes of work as very important (Kirkpatrick-Johnson, 2002).

The high frequency of the career apparel category simply suggests that these participants often envision physical details of themselves in the future. Yet, these self-images seemed to contextualize a work-related value, adding intensity to a particular self-conception, or blending together two self-conceptions. These self-images are reflective of Super's (1963) *complex self-concept*, that is, they become more organized within a role framework such as the role of work. For example, one participant described the expensive suit and tie he was wearing not only as a symbol of his financial success but also as a symbol of prestige. Another participant described her old dirty physician's scrubs in the context of herself as a doctor, embedded with importance, and participating in humanitarian medical work abroad.

Participants in this study generally described a wide variety of emotional states within their daydreams. These emotions consisted of both positive and negative reactions and existed on a spectrum of intensity from general satisfaction to complete emotional engagement and from general dissatisfaction to apathy. Although it was not in the scope of this research to examine the relationships between affective responses and elements of participants' work-related daydreams, it is quite evident that each emotional description is related to specific experiences the participants describe in their daydream. For example, as proposed by Super et al. (1996), depictions of job and life satisfaction seemed to be facilitated by a sense that one's job is an outlet for one's interests, values, and abilities. However, they also depicted self-evaluative statements, which Super (1963) defined as the self-concept meta-dimension of *self-esteem*. For example, one participant stated, "I love problem solving. It makes me feel important and vital to my environment," while another participant stated, "I felt proud of how well I could take care of my home and my family."

The third research question explored how work-related daydreams are reflective of an individual's self-concept system. The results indicate that these participants generally daydream about specific life roles (i.e., role of wife, role of husband, role of mother) in conjunction with the role of work, and generally consider potential life role interactions. Nine participants described conflicts between life roles; each instance was specifically a work–family conflict. This supports recent research suggesting that college students are able to anticipate future conflicts between work and family roles with a high degree of detail (Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009). However, just as many participants depicted a scenario in which their work and family roles were integrated, which suggests that these students are also proactively seeking future solutions to anticipated conflicts by creating mental models of how to balance work and family roles successfully.

Taken together the results suggest that the participants of this study did daydream about their work lives. The daydreams frequently included images of participating in work that helps other, offers a level of responsibility, financial prosperity and occupational prestige, social relationships, recognition, and a sense of accomplishment. Further, these daydreams frequently included detailed descriptions of one's physical work environment including its location, the psychological feel of the environment,

and the nature of the work. Lastly, they frequently described life roles aside from the role of work, interactions among these roles, feelings of satisfaction with work, and a sense of long-term achievement in one's career.

Limitations

This study, as with all qualitative studies, has specific limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings. The study sample was small, nonrandom, and regionally limited. Moreover, the participants were limited in terms of the range of demographics. All of the participants were traditional-aged college students attending a competitive research university, and most of them identified their race as Caucasian. The results can be attributed to any of these factors. Future researchers might examine the work-related daydreams of individuals from different populations such as nontraditional, part-time community college students, or full-time workers. Related to this point, the scope of this study did not allow for the exploration of similarities and differences of daydream content between participants. Future research might examine intra-participant frequencies (e.g., gender differences regarding particular themes), to gain a more in-depth understanding of the construct. Also, qualitative studies are inherently subject to the implicit biases of the research team that analyzes the data. The researchers attempted to mitigate as much bias as much as possible through a process of prolonged engagement with the data, the collaborative process between the research team, and the use of the auditors. Yet, inherent bias should be recognized, as our unique cultural perceptions may have influenced one or more aspects of the investigation. Despite these limitations, the research has important implications for practice and future research.

Implications

A profound implication of our findings is that the work-related daydreams provided by the study participants are essentially detailed and vivid examples of what has been referred to as a career narrative (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1997). Many are fully developed stories that are embedded with objective information about individuals' self-conceptions (i.e., values, self-images, aspirations), as well as subjective assessments of the meaning individuals place on the role of work. As such, they provide detailed glimpses of the many possible options that each individual perceives as they attempt to implement a vocational self-concept. While some daydreams depict highly realistic possibilities, and others depict complete fantasy, most seem to articulate coherent and cohesive explanations of individuals' goals, desires, and purposes regarding the role of work. We believe that work-related daydreams can be used by counselors as qualitative assessment technique that aids in the facilitation of clients' awareness of their expectations in terms of work. Because the daydreams are the highly personalized creations of the individuals making, they are tailored for a constructivist approach, which views assessment as a collaborative process in which the client possesses the expertise (Brott, 2005).

An even more profound implication of this study is the fact that many of the daydreams the participants presented locate the role of work within a much larger lifestyle narrative. Individuals shared perspectives of what their lives may look like in the future, with work, within and outside the occupational structure (Richardson, 1993), being one of many integrated aspects of this possible life. Moreover, lifestyle choices (Giddens, 1991) such as social practices, ways of living, and consumer choices and habits were often depicted with vivid details and imagery. For example, one participant stated, "I hop in my eco-friendly car and roll the windows down to enjoy my ride to the hospital where I work," while another participant stated, "I'm living and working in southern California, not far from the beach where it's sunny and beautiful . . . I walk down the beach with my dog. I'm wearing capris and a tanktop with a cardigan and no shoes." Such internal images epitomize the postmodern perspective of career as an integration of all aspects of a person's life. They also give credence to the post-modern career counseling approach of constructing stories that allow individuals to make sense of who they are in relation to the world (Cochran, 1997).

As Klinger (1990) states, "daydreaming is both one of the most common and one of the most private things we do" (p. xii). Yet the literature notes that for a number of reasons, daydreams have not been recognized as viable material to be used to help clients in counseling (Barth, 1997). Based on the results of this study, we contend that work-related daydreams may provide counselors and their clients accessible, detailed, and highly relevant information that can be used to facilitate self-awareness applicable to career and lifestyle choices.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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