

# Sex Bias, Old age, Career Counselling and the New Zealand Revision of the Self Directed Search: A Comment.

Bryan Tuck +  
Brian Keeling + +

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It is now over a decade since we published the NZ revision of the Self Directed Search (SDS-NZ). Holland has since rewritten his text (Holland, 1985), published further revisions of his instruments and contributed to an issue of a major refereed journal devoted entirely to aspects of his theory (Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 40, 2, 1992). We thus agree with Bloor that it is time for the SDS-NZ to be revisited, but would argue that until this occurs there is still a place for the existing SDS-NZ in career counselling.

Hackett, Lent and Greenhouse (1991) believe Holland's theory to be the most highly researched theoretical perspective in the area of vocational psychology. Much of the research has used the SDS as the primary measure of personality. Even though this research has not used samples of New Zealanders it is still relevant, eg. consider Bloor's judgement that our research did ". . . not support the theoretical ordering of personality types. . ." We would argue that the most defensible conclusion is that our research provided partial support, eg. with females 38 out of the 54 comparisons of the correlations among adjacent, alternate and opposite types were in the postulated order and with males 44 out of the 54 comparisons were consistent with Holland's hexagonal ordering of types. We did find that Holland's hexagonal model was a better fit for males than females. Note our emphasis

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+ Education Department, University of Auckland

+ + Christchurch

on better, but the findings should not lead the reader to reject Holland's model outright.

Some ten years later Holland and Gottfredson (1992, p.166) concluded that with regard to the hexagonal model ". . . differences among national or ethnic groups are usually smaller than the differences between men and women of the same age group." The results of our research in the early eighties is entirely consistent with the patterns observed in the last decade in a number of countries. The research on whether the best ordering of the personality types is circular or hexagonal or hierarchical or one or two dimensional does not lead us to reject Holland's theory outright. Rather we would simply reiterate our earlier position.

We still believe that the user of the SDS needs to have reservations about the implications of the model for vocational adjustment. There is a considerable body of research that shows that workers in jobs which are congruent with their Holland type tend to be more satisfied than those working in environments inconsistent with their Holland type (Assouline and Meir, 1987). The relationship is not strong, because a variety of factors affect the quality of one's working life other than the naive match between personality and environmental characteristics (Gati, 1989).

The point to be made is that the results of our early research using New Zealand subjects is consistent with the results of more recent research undertaken in a range of western capitalist cultures. The absence of current published New Zealand research

using the SDS-NZ is a problem, but because of the similarity between the revision and the original version, and the consistency between the findings of our early studies and later research in other countries, the SDS-NZ is not as theoretically and technically impoverished as Bloor's paper suggests.

Bloor is particularly concerned about "... the inherent sex bias in SDS-NZ items which, in turn, would appear to reinforce existing gender stratification in the workforce." Instruments like the SDS have been referred to as sex-restrictive rather than sex biased since the late 1970's and early eighties. The reason is that they reflect rather than construct patterns of socialisation, ie. patterns of scores on such instruments mirror the divisions in society along such lines as gender, social class and ethnicity. Restrictive is preferred to biased because it does not lay a pejorative connotation on the instrument.

Following the revision of the SDS we went to considerable trouble in the development of the Job Activities Guide (Tuck and Keeling, 1986) to produce scales composed of items equally attractive to men and women. We failed! Bloor refers to an earlier study (Keeling and Tuck, 1978), but misinterprets what for us was the significant finding. In that study young women found vocational alternatives based on same-sex norms relatively unattractive. Advocates of same-sex norms argued that because they resulted in similar proportions of men and women having the same primary personality codes, their use would lead to men and women exploring less gender stereotyped careers.

Our 1978 study suggested that it was naive to believe that working on the characteristics of the instrument would bring about such an outcome. We provided norms, albeit inadequate, for the SDS-NZ because we believed that people should have their existing patterns of socialisation challenged; similarly we suggested that women with Investigative personality types should be

encouraged to look at Realistic occupations. But attempts to change adolescents' and children's gender stereotyped views of occupations have in general failed. Stockard and McGee (1990) suggest that attempts to counteract occupational stereotyping without parallel changes in the composition of the labour force have been relatively unsuccessful.

Our position, which we have held since 1986, is neither a justification nor a rationale for any attempt at social engineering. We said then that those of us involved in career counselling need to "...challenge stereotyped views about occupations whether they are a function of social class or gender." (Tuck and Keeling, 1986, p.7). We need as counsellors to ensure that adolescents and adults of both sexes are aware of how different patterns of socialisation have shaped their views of what is appropriate. Sikes (1991, p.153) reached a similar conclusion: "If we are to discourage inadvertent and unconscious reproduction of gender stereotypes we need to play an active part in helping students to examine critically and sociologically their experiences and to think about their taken for granted knowledge." The SDS-NZ, because it is sex restrictive, provides the stimulus for the critical examination of "taken for granted knowledge". What Bloor sees as a weakness, the open sex-restrictive nature of the scales, we see as a strength.

Bloor's paper is timely, weak pun intended, and as mentioned earlier we agree that the revision should be revisited; this is particularly critical for The Occupations Finder, because of new technology, changes in job titles and entry requirements. But we do not accept Bloor's conclusion that . . . "Overall the evidence suggests that this instrument is promoted more for its brevity, simplicity and the "do-it-yourself" feature than for its technical adequacy." The existing revision of the SDS is simply not theoretically and technically impoverished.

We would not have become involved in the associated research and development if brevity and simplicity was its major virtue. In our judgement the existing revision of the SDS still has a place in counselling and career development, but the counsellor would be well advised not to use it as a stand alone instrument. It should be used as part of a counselling process. Do not throw out the baby with the bath water!

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