

# PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE AND ATTAINMENT

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine how two psychoanalytic concepts—character structure and defense mechanism—elucidate the issues of occupational choice and attainment. By character structure we mean an individual's general mode of functioning. By defense mechanism we mean ways of responding to anxiety. Both factors shape the behavioral expression of ideas and feelings and interact with occupational requirements. Using five styles of functioning—defined as personality disorders in DSM III-R—we discuss implications for career development. First, we argue that individuals with different character structures select into, and succeed in, occupations that reward their particular personality type. In this framework, mild levels of character disorders are turned into assets in certain work contexts. Second, we argue that mature—that is, “neurotic”—defenses enhance attainment in a wide range of occupations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there have been several attempts by sociologists to analyze the relationship between personality structure and occupational choice and attainment, none have been directed toward the analysis of achievement within specific occupations. In this paper, we propose to assess how character structure and defense mechanisms influence occupational choice and attainment, and to show how occupational requirements and work cultures reinforce and reward "neurotic traits." By *character structure*, we mean an individual's general mode of functioning, including cognitive and affective skills (Fenichel 1945; Shapiro, 1965). By *defense mechanisms*, we mean ways of responding to anxiety (Schafer 1968; Vaillant 1971, 1986). Both factors shape the conscious and unconscious expression of ideas and feelings and, we argue, interact with occupational requirements. We start by reviewing some major sociological and psychoanalytic traditions relevant to this formulation.

Attempts at including sociopsychological variables in a model of occupational attainment date at least to the work of Strong (1943). Early studies of achievement, as reviewed by Haller (1982) and Hotchkiss and Borow (1984), developed along two lines. One tradition investigated the impact of cognitive and social context variables (e.g., mental ability, parental and teacher encouragement, peer influence) on educational achievement (Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969; Alexander, Eckland, and Griffin 1975; Land 1971). Under the rubric of the "status-attainment model," these variables were used to explicate the process of intergenerational transmission of occupational advantage (Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan 1972; Sewell and Hauser 1975; Jencks et al. 1972).

The second tradition, which considers intrapsychic, unconscious processes underlying attainment, focused on determinants of the "need to achieve," which was seen as "a deep, unconscious, internal demand to perform excellently" (Haller 1982, p. 9). This tradition has led to little empirical research and has received minimal recognition by sociologists, probably because the conceptualization and measurement problems are very difficult. Some early studies, which predated the status-attainment model, considered the role of childhood socialization and family climate in explaining variations in aspiration and motivation (Sewell and Shah 1965; Sewell, Hauser, and Wolf 1980). They incorporated social-psychological variables, following in the tradition of Mead (1934), Lewin (1939) and Heider (1958). Important parts of the model involved processes of internalization, imitation, and the role of "psychological environment" (Haller 1982), but no attention was paid to unconscious processes in the way that motivation and aspirations are shaped.<sup>1</sup>

Other sociologists have looked at the relationship between personality and work structures (Mills 1951; Gerth and Mills 1953; Becker and Strauss 1956; Kohn and Schooler 1983; Mortimer, Lorence, and Kumka 1986). Gerth and Mills

(1953), for example, pointed out how organizational structure and occupational culture interact with personality characteristics in affecting an individual's sense of self and work performance. Kohn (1969) and Kohn and Schooler (1983), in an influential set of studies, have demonstrated the impact of work characteristics, such as autonomy and complexity, upon an individual's conception of self and style of intellectual functioning, while Mortimer et al. (1986, pp. 88–140) have stressed the effect of occupational socialization on satisfaction and psychological orientation.

Sociologists like Mills (1951), Blau (1955), Scheff (1979), and Hochschild (1983) have emphasized the centrality of emotions in face-to-face relationships, and have analyzed organizational mechanisms for controlling them. They explained how the expression of emotions is influenced by specific work cultures and work requirements. The effects of work environment on self-esteem and self-identity have been well-documented (Kohn and Schooler 1983; Rosenberg 1979). What has not been adequately studied is the impact of personality structure on the performance of occupational roles in *specific* work settings. To put it differently, we need to study the interaction between personality styles and job requirements.<sup>2</sup>

Relevant to this issue, there is a considerable literature concerning the "matching" of individuals and jobs. This literature focuses on the educational and experience requirements of jobs and the credentials of workers (e.g., Mincer 1974; Spilerman and Lunde 1990). Success in "matching" is often inferred from the nature of workers' occupational skills and their relation to productivity, though the determination of an appropriate match also reflects bargaining power over job requirements (Sørensen and Kalleberg 1981). Yet, the matching literature is principally concerned with *level* of skills and job requirements, rather than *types* of skills and requirements. Indeed, aside from discussions of "occupational inheritance," little attention has been given by sociologists to identify the mechanisms underlying selection of detailed occupation.

There has been some consideration by vocational psychologists of the fit between psychological needs and job demands (Super 1942; Strong 1943; Roe 1956; Holland 1966, 1985; Schein 1978), usually from the perspective of educational placement, improving coping skills, or motivating workers; sometimes from the perspective of matching individuals' interests with organizational needs (Schein 1978; Levinson 1971). Holland's formulation (1977, 1985) is probably the most influential. Individuals, in his schema, are categorized into six personality types; work contexts are similarly classified, and career involvement and job satisfaction are assumed to be positively associated with conditions of congruence (Holland 1985, pp. 1–33). While questions can be raised about the conceptual utility of Holland's personality categories (to be discussed in a later section of this paper), there is evidence that congruence does predict to occupational stability (Gottfredson 1977).

Studies of occupational groups—such as engineers, nurses, actors, scientists,

teachers, and artists—using variants of a factor-trait model have also shown systematic evidence of personality differences (see reviews in Osipow 1968, pp. 182–199 and Roe and Lunneborg 1984). While the authors emphasize caution concerning the effectiveness of these findings for counseling individuals, the studies do show a clear pattern at the population level: different occupations attract individuals with distinctive combinations of personality traits. What the authors of these studies did not do is propose a theoretical formulation to account for the matches between occupational affiliation and personality styles, and they failed to consider whether particular personality structures might be *functional* in specific work settings.

The writings of Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950) on prejudice, of Miller and Swanson (1960) on defenses and inner conflicts, and of Swanson (1988) on defenses and social relations have integrated sociological, psychological, and psychoanalytic perspectives. The work of Miller and Swanson is especially important for our purpose because it focuses on the social and familial origins of defense mechanisms and expressive styles. Among lower-class individuals, the defenses used are likely to be denial, withdrawal, and direct expression of anger, while among the middle class, the defenses are turning-against-the-self, reversal of affect, and displacement (Miller and Swanson 1960, pp. 43–67).<sup>3</sup> The authors go on to suggest that these defenses become reinforced by the type of occupation an individual enters.

Psychoanalysts have analyzed symptoms, pathologies, and anxieties around the fear of achievement, which result in self-defeating or destructive behavior. They stress the role of unresolved conflicts from childhood as obstacles to adult adjustment in the areas of work and love (Freud [1905]1953, [1911]1958). In classical psychoanalytic thinking, the “need to achieve” has been defined as a way of sublimating sexual and libidinal drives (Freud 1930). Fear of achievement is analyzed as either the result of unresolved oedipal conflicts (Freud [1926]1959b; Fenichel 1945), a masochistic intolerance of success that requires self-imposed defeat (Klein 1952), or as a failure in the separation-individuation process (Miller 1981; Satow 1988).

A group of psychoanalysts and organizational consultants have applied psychoanalytic concerns to the analysis of work performance among corporate managers (Levinson 1968; Maccoby 1976; Kernberg 1979; Kets de Vries 1980). The main focus has been the examination of “pathologies” or “irrational behavior” in a work organization, and the identification of types of leadership styles such as the “destructive executive” (Kets de Vries 1980, p. 89). The intent is to prevent undesired outcomes, stemming from individuals’ unconscious wishes and from group processes that exacerbate pathological personality traits (Kubie 1953; Zaleznik 1967; Levinson 1968; Kernberg 1984).

Minimal attention has been given to a consideration of pathological character traits and defenses as possibly *adaptive*, rather than disruptive, of work performance. LaBier (1984, pp. 3–37), however, did observe the existence of neurotic

conflicts among managers which did not impede occupational success and Mac-coby (1976) remarked that pathological defenses can protect a leader from excessive fears of envy, hostility, and rage—a point to which we return later. Finally, Kubie (1953), in an analysis of scientists' careers, outlined the role of unconscious wishes and fantasies in guiding the selection of theoretical frameworks and research projects.

Thus, with a few important exceptions, psychoanalysts have focused on the analysis of neurotic traits and pathological defenses as factors which impede rather than enhance occupational performance. Some researchers, however, like Vaillant (1974, 1975), Kernberg (1984) and Westen (1985) have considered the *adaptive* functions of defense mechanisms, and have noted that conflicts do not necessarily interfere with occupational success. Vaillant (1977, pp. 127–157) has even pointed out that neurotic defenses can be functional for work performance. Yet, in the main, the available theoretical and methodological paradigms have led psychoanalysts to focus on the dysfunctional features of particular personality types.

## CHARACTER STRUCTURE AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS AS DETERMINANTS OF OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE AND ATTAINMENT

Several psychoanalysts (e.g., Shapiro 1965; Kernberg 1979) have observed that patients with hysterical personality styles do not enter certain occupations—ones that demand detailed technical skills and emotional control. Instead they gravitate toward occupations that reward intuition and rely on diffuse cognition and direct emotional experience—such as writer and artist. Other patients, with obsessive-compulsive styles, go into fields that draw upon technical skills, require limited emotional affect, and reward a “driven personality.” What is suggested by these observations is that an individual's neurotic symptoms are not always obstacles to occupational success; indeed, the reverse may be true—neurotic symptoms become *advantages* in specific occupational and work contexts even while they remain impediments to success in other spheres of life, such as family and intimate relations. It has also been remarked that persons who can draw upon “mature defenses”—that is, defenses that emerge late in the psychosexual stage of development, when the ego is stronger, are more likely to be successful *irrespective of the chosen occupation* (Vaillant 1971; Vaillant and Drake 1985; Vaillant et al. 1986).

The concept of character structure was first introduced by Freud in “Character and Anal Erotism” (1908), and developed in “The Predisposition to Obsessional Neurosis” ([1913]1959a), to explore relatively stable forms of symptomatology. In psychoanalytic theory, character structure refers to “enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself” (*Diag-*

*nostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III-R* [henceforth DSM III-R], American Psychiatric Association 1987, p. 335). In the process of ego development and maturation, individuals unconsciously "select" character traits and adopt defense mechanisms to adjust to inner pressures and outer demands and to protect themselves from the onslaught of unacceptable or unpleasurable feelings. The end-product of this process is the emergence of an integrated character and defensive structure, what Reich (1933, p. 144) referred to as the "total formation."<sup>4</sup>

*Character types* are described by a prevalent (primary) mode of cognition, emotional expression, and defensive style. For example, an obsessive-compulsive style of functioning is defined by technical thinking, pervasive doubting, procrastination, and need for emotional control. However, this is not to say that an obsessive-compulsive character style cannot have paranoid or narcissistic features; rather that they would play a secondary role.<sup>5</sup>

*Defense mechanism* refers to habitual, unconscious, and sometimes pathological processes that are employed to resolve conflicts between instinctual needs, internalized prohibitions, and external reality (Freud 1937).<sup>6</sup> According to much psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Freud [1937]1966; Hartmann 1950; Klein 1959; Vaillant 1971), an individual's defenses reflect critical experiences during childhood. Defenses differ from character structure in that they are specifically geared toward coping with anxiety, rather than being a general mode of functioning (Freud [1926]1959b; Shapiro 1965). An individual's defensive armor is made up of adaptive and regressive components. Adaptive defenses become integrated in the overall personality and guide everyday behavior (Schafer 1968), while regressive defenses are activated when unconscious childhood fears are reexperienced in adulthood and impede normal functioning (Miller and Swanson 1960, pp. 194–289).

Our use of psychoanalytic concepts contrasts with the usual psychoanalytic formulations in several ways. First, we focus on an understanding of the *behavioral manifestations* of unconscious conflicts, rather than on intrapsychic processes. Second, we explore determinants of occupational choice and attainment rather than explaining fear of success. Such a starting point allows for a mixture of psychoanalytic and sociological formulations. Third, we analyze the effect of character structure and defense mechanisms on occupational success, rather than accounting for their genesis. Fourth, we study style of functioning and defense mechanisms as they affect the normal, everyday performance of individuals, rather than pathological forms of behavior.

It is our intention in this paper to assess which personality style, or combination of character traits, is likely to be conducive to success and attainment in a specific occupation. We argue that different styles of functioning can affect an individual's work career, from the initial choice of occupation to later moves and promotions. We also suggest that *defenses* are determinants of *level* of attainment in a great many occupations; they are global enhancers of work performance. To

be specific, mature defenses, which emerge at late stages of the psychosexual development—such as suppression, anticipation, and rationalization—are generally more functional for work performance (Vaillant 1976), as they strengthen the work culture, than immature (early) defenses such as acting-out or regression. Acting out hostile, destructive, and libidinal wishes is not easily tolerated in the workplace; organizational rules as well as occupational norms are used to monitor their expression.

### Occupational Choice

Occupations can be characterized on the basis of cognitive and emotional skills required to perform certain tasks. Some occupations require concentrated attention and narrow, logical thinking, while others necessitate global, intuitive, or impressionistic cognition. Some occupations rely on direct expression of emotions while others look at emotional expression as a hindrance (Roe 1956; Miller and Swanson 1960, p. 210). Other factors being constant, we suggest that individuals unconsciously self-select into occupations that reward their cognitive and emotional modes of functioning.

By the time occupational selection occurs, individuals often have been weeded out by course requirements in school—in terms of affective skills, as well as intellectual endowment—and channelled into specific fields of study.<sup>7</sup> The longer the education or training, the more likely that this process will have occurred. It is difficult to imagine, for example, an hysterical or impulsive personality type surviving university training to become a “bench scientist.” The methodological attention to detail, necessary for success, would not be there. Fortunately, because of the long training required of scientists, an initial mismatch between aspirations and personality structure would have been corrected long before occupational entrance.

Mismatches are more likely to occur in large bureaucratic settings. Here the effective personality type is less clear because the work tasks are diverse and there is much occupational changing during the course of employment. It is difficult for educational institutions to create training contexts that simulate the work environment when a career will encompass a variety of job tasks with different emotional demands. In this circumstance, schooling requirements cannot easily be used to select for occupational success.

The evidence is considerable that individuals self-select into social contexts consistent with their character dispositions. Extroverts seek out social milieus that provide opportunities for assertiveness and competitiveness (Furnham 1971). Sensation seekers select sensation-providing environments (Zuckerman 1974); authoritarians choose authoritarian education settings (Stern, Stein, and Bloom 1956). Reviewing this literature, Snyder and Ickes (1985, p. 918) conclude, “individuals appear to gravitate actively toward social situations that will foster

and encourage the behavioral expression of their own characteristic dispositions and interpersonal orientations.”

There is parallel evidence with respect to occupational selection, though empirical studies of choice of *detailed* occupation are few. Kohn and Schooler (1983, pp. 114–150) and Mortimer et. al. (1986, pp. 74–85) examined the relation between personality variables and job characteristics; these studies consistently show a large impact of personality on job features—with the intervening mechanism presumably being occupational selection—as well as, usually, smaller reverse effects.<sup>8</sup> Other studies (see review in Holland 1985) have reported an association between personality measures and detailed occupational choice, though the samples, for the most part, have been small and idiosyncratic. Some fairly systematic appraisals of the occupational plans of college students have also concluded that the selection process reflects one’s disposition, whether formulated in terms of values or personality traits (Davis 1965; Rosenberg 1957, pp. 36–47).

Occupational shifts and career changes can also be defined as attempts to search for a context in which the dominant traits of one’s own personality can be satisfactorily expressed. We are suggesting that—all else being equal—occupational changes can be seen as part of a process of matching and rematching character traits with job requirements. Moreover, this process takes on heightened significance at advanced stages of the work career, when character traits and style of functioning often replace technical skills as critical factors in occupational selection (Bingham and Davis 1924).

### Occupational Success

Sociologists have analyzed occupational achievement as a function of intelligence, education, motivation, and aspirations (Blau and Duncan 1967; Jencks et al. 1972; Hauser and Featherman 1977; Sewell et al. 1980). These analyses, however, are insensitive to the possibility that the determinants of success might differ by type of career. A formulation such as the status-attainment model does not discriminate between achievement as a scientist, a manager, a bureaucrat, or an entrepreneur. A more sophisticated approach to the analysis of occupational success would involve a determination of which character style is likely to influence attainment in *specific kinds of occupations and career lines*.

Organizational structure and the culture of the workplace provide contexts in which individuals perform their occupational roles. Occupational success, as measured by rate of advancement, may rest as much on the use of “emotional intelligence”<sup>9</sup>—that is, the ability to understand the unwritten code of an organization—and style of emotional expressiveness, as it does on knowledge or technical skills. The so-called “Peter Principle,” which intimates that an individual rises to a level just beyond his/her competence, may reflect a process by which, as a career evolves, different defense mechanisms become conducive to



success. The "sociological" explanation of failure is one of the individual lacking the necessary cognitive skills or social connections in the new position. The "psychoanalytic" explanation stresses the anxieties created, the resulting dysfunctional behavior, and the prospects of quickly putting into place new coping strategies (Henry 1949, pp. 85-95; Nicholson 1984, p. 183).

In the following, we argue that individuals are more likely to succeed in occupations that reward the expression of their "neurotic traits," as reflected in their cognitive and emotional style. (By neurotic traits we refer to those aspects of character structure that are commonly perceived as problematic and as interfering with a "healthy" life adaptation [American Psychiatric Association 1980, pp. 8-10].)<sup>10</sup> For example, obsessive-compulsive traits are conducive to success as a draftsman, engineer, or accountant.<sup>11</sup> Concentration, logical thinking, and *neurotic symptoms*—such as limited affect, narrow mindedness, obsessive doubting, and driven activities—contribute to the successful performance of many systematic tasks. The same character traits in another occupational field, such as fashion design or performing arts, would handicap the individual rather than be adaptive to work performance. Thus, not only do personality types gravitate to appropriate occupations and situations but, given occupational selection, attainment is probably correlated with character style and possibly with, at least, mild levels of neurotic impairment.

## NEUROTIC STYLES OF FUNCTIONING: ILLUSTRATIONS FROM FIVE CHARACTER TYPES

In his analysis of character types, Shapiro (1965) suggests that style of functioning creates a process by which specific cognitive modes and affective orientations reinforce neurotic traits "[The neurotic person] seems to think in such a way and his attitudes and interests are such as to continue and sustain the neurotic process, however discomforting [it] may be. This is not to say, certainly, that he does this by choice or that he can be talked out of it. It simply says that his make-up and the way he sees things—about which he has no choice—move him to feel, think, and do things that continue the neurotic experience and are indispensable to it" (Shapiro 1965, p. 18).

We wish here to describe five different personality styles and show how they influence occupational choice, and success within specific occupations.<sup>12</sup> Psychoanalysts have elaborated several major character types (See American Psychiatric Association 1987, pp. 335-358). In the following, we focus on five of the types which appear the most relevant to an analysis of work career features. We emphasize that these personality styles are ideal types. Individuals are, commonly, mixtures of the types. Also keep in mind that we are speaking about the functionality of mild levels of these traits, not psychotic levels.

## Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Style

Individuals with obsessive-compulsive styles appear tense, worried, but in control of themselves. They tend to be characterized by a cognitive mode that pays great attention to details, by sharp and concentrated thinking, imperturbability in the search for facts, and great capacity for solving technical problems. The life of an obsessive-compulsive individual is organized around work and around the subjective experiences associated with work. There is a continuous and tense deliberateness, a continuous sense of effort (Shapiro 1965, p. 31). Nothing is achieved without worry. There is a constant feeling of "trying hard" and a sense of inner pressure, a feeling of being driven by an invisible overseer (the tyrannical super-ego). Obsessive-compulsive individuals have a sharp awareness of themselves in specific social roles. For example, they will compulsively play the role of being a doctor, engineer, lover, or father. What that means, is that they are constantly conforming to how they think a doctor, a professor, a lover, or a father *should* act, dress, and talk (Shapiro 1965, p. 38).

There are two clear symptoms of obsessive-compulsive thinking: constant doubting and uncertainty, on the one hand, and dogmatic thinking, on the other. Doubting takes the form of well-balanced ambivalence and is a constant source of worry which is expressed as, "What is the right thing to do?" "What principle should I follow?" Decision making is difficult. The obsessive-compulsive analyzes the pros and cons of any situation for a long time. However, the actual decision will come rather abruptly, as a way of ending the inner stalemate and going on to another cycle of ambivalence, inner pressure, and hasty decisions around the next technical problem.

Obsessive-compulsives tend to have restricted affect and a great deal of control over expressing emotions. The direct expression of emotion is perceived as potentially dangerous (even in clinical settings), and is subjectively experienced as fear of "losing control" or "going crazy" (Shapiro 1965, p. 45). Constriction of affect can be seen in the type of defenses that they use: *rationalization* (paying attention to irrelevant details as a way to dismiss emotional content), *intellectualization* (paying undue attention to the inanimate world to avoid expression of inner feelings), *isolation of affect* (thinking about instinctual wishes in formal, affectively bland terms and not acting on them). The obsessive-compulsive individual searches for contexts, especially work situations, in which one can have control of one's emotions. Isolation of affect allows keeping family problems at bay, while investing greater emotional involvement in the areas of work. Among research scientists described by Eiduson (1962, p. 105), neurotic defenses that permit one to shut off worries extraneous to work are functional for work performance as they make it possible to concentrate and undertake long tedious tasks.

It should be noted that obsessive-compulsive individuals often have difficult personal and marital relationships since their emotional sphere is restricted and their need to be in control is very great. Unlike the work setting, family and

intimate relationships do not provide arenas in which obsessive-compulsive modes of thinking and feelings can be reinforced and rewarded. Marital and parental tasks are not easily definable and they are not task specific; spouse and children expect emotional sharing and involvement, whereas the need to control one's environment takes the form of creating emotional distance (Kubie 1953, pp. 248–258). For example, the obsessive-compulsive tries hard to be a “good” parent, setting time aside for spouse and children, but is unable to get emotionally involved in family life. Mitroff, Jacob, and Moore (1977), in a study of scientists' wives, show the existence of severe symptomatology and family disruption which result from emotional deprivation.<sup>13</sup>

One would expect to find obsessive-compulsive individuals in occupations that stress technical details, that require concentrated, logical, methodical thinking, and sustained attention. Obsessive-compulsives are also likely to be successful in work settings where social interaction is not central to the work process, where decision making beyond one's narrow technical expertise is not required, and where the direct expression of emotions is discouraged. Obsessive-compulsives should perform well in work contexts where they can control the conditions of work, and in occupational cultures that stress objectivity and detachment. Examples of occupations that provide a suitable work context are scientist, lab technician, programmer, engineer, accountant, computer analyst, draftsman, surveyor, engraver, and lithographer.<sup>14</sup>

### The Paranoid Personality Style

The character traits of paranoid individuals are turned into assets in certain work contexts, such as bureaucracies or corporations, where a state of alertness and suspicion in a highly-competitive milieu contributes to safety through the detection of incipient threats. As a colleague remarked with respect to his university: “Those who do well in administration see a threat behind every rock. Often they are wrong, but they sure as hell discover real threats quickly.” This observation is quite to the point. Individuals characterized by a paranoid style of functioning have an unusually acute and active form of attentiveness. They are good observers, continually searching with rigid attention for any external threat. There is a constant sense of anticipation, which ensures that an individual will not be taken by surprise. The paranoid individual does not tolerate unexpected or unusual events. He/she is in a state of readiness for an emergency that requires total mobilization (Maccoby 1976, p. 194; Shapiro 1965, pp. 54–64).

The paranoid individual is always uncovering clues. What is most striking about paranoids, is the way they miss the obvious through lack of contextualization. As Shapiro (1965, p. 66) observed, the paranoid individual “is absolutely right in perception, and absolutely wrong in judgment.” The paranoid person's intense and directed attention to uncovering clues is combined with attempts at attributing motives to others' behavior. Facts are never accepted at face value but

are viewed in terms of hidden meaning (Henri 1949, pp. 286–291). The paranoid's subjective experience appears split between the objective reality (the search for hard facts) and the private world of hidden meanings. *Denial* is a defense used by paranoid individuals, which helps to keep these two levels of experience separate. The individual's logical process of thinking is not impaired, but a distorted subjective interpretation of reality is experienced (Shapiro 1965, pp. 66–68). To an outside observer, this type of denial often is not noticeable in everyday behavior and often passes for normal.

The other mechanism of defense used by paranoids is that of *projection*. Projection is a mechanism by which one's own feelings, especially persecutory fears, are cast onto persons usually perceived as weaker and more vulnerable than oneself. This mechanism allows an individual to control others, to externalize the inner tension onto the outside world (scapegoating). As Sennett has shown in his analysis of authority, projection is a perfect instrument to spread fear and enforce conformity among employees in impersonal bureaucratic settings (1981, p. 101). Projection is often coupled with a passive-aggressive stand toward authority (Adorno et al. 1950). When the paranoid's emotional cover-up and paranoid armor are no longer sufficient to deal with anxieties, severe psychosomatic symptoms, delusionary persecutory fears, and a sense of catastrophic defeat are likely to take over (Perry and Cooper 1989).<sup>15</sup>

A paranoid's state of alertness and constant scrutiny affects his/her presentation of self. Paranoid individuals tend to curb the expression of emotions in order not to reveal themselves (Maccoby 1976, p. 194). They will appear friendly, smooth, serious, or enthusiastic depending on what the situation calls for. But, there is a sense that their behavior is not genuine. When they act friendly, they do not feel friendly, when they laugh they are not amused. Even their physical appearance and demeanor are presented stiffly and rigidly.

Paranoid individuals' ability to hide behind a mask and pretend to feel emotions, adjusting one's mood to the demands of changing situations, allows them to interact smoothly with people in power. As Jackall has observed in a study of corporate managers, passive-aggressive behavior protects managers by enabling them to hide their antagonistic and hostile feelings behind a polite facade (Jackall 1983, 1988). Their inner resentment, even antagonism, toward authority is often strong but is usually coupled with an outer conformity. Paranoids fear being controlled and they are concerned about being tricked into doing something they do not want to do, which leads them to pay a great deal of attention to issues of power, rank, and relational position. Behind these fears are strong sadistic and authoritarian tendencies (Adorno et al. 1950).

The paranoid style of functioning can be successful in complex organizational and bureaucratic settings such as corporations, unions, and political parties. Paranoid types such as the "jungle fighter," to use Maccoby's (1976) term, have an especially strong advantage in highly competitive settings, where advancement in the organization is based on outmaneuvering others (Kanter 1977, pp. 47–68; Jackall 1988).<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that paranoia is the principal

déterminant of attainment in large organizations, or that task specific skills are unimportant, only that personality types cannot be ignored once other variables are held constant.

### The Hysterical Personality Style

Individuals with hysterical personality styles tend to exhibit modes of cognition based on impressions, not on facts or logical thinking. Solutions are reached on the basis of hunches, rather than systematic logical steps. Hystericals are able to solve a technical problem but are unable to tell you how they went about finding an answer. Their thinking mode is nontechnical, their attention span is intense but limited, their emotions are strongly expressed. They are easily distracted, impressionable; their attention is quickly captured by new, striking, and vivid scenes (Shapiro 1965, pp. 108–118).

The hysterical's subjective world is sentimental and romantic; it is also colorful, rich, and emotionally exciting, but it is not based on facts. Hystericals exhibit child-like astonishment about totally predictable events. Their attachments tend to be superficial for fear of loss and disappointment (pre-oedipal fears). The seeming indifference—"la belle indifference" so well described by Breuer and Freud ([1893]1955)—is usually followed by explosive attacks that are, however, quickly forgotten, providing cycles of highly emotional outbursts and inhibited behavior.

Hysterical personality types use *repression* (forgetting, memory lapses, lack of recognition or internal stimuli or external inputs) and *acting out* as major defenses. Acting out is the direct expression of an unconscious wish or impulse in order to avoid recognizing the affect that accompanies the wish. Acting out often takes the form of impulsive acts, and temper tantrums. As a style, acting out usually does not allow for delayed gratification.

Hysterical personality types are likely to choose, and be successful in, occupations that use intense, vivid, and exciting imagery, that capitalize on immediate and instant responses to events, that rest on the ability to capture the transient feeling tone of an environment, rather than paying attention to facts or technical details. Artist, comedian, writer, fashion designer, actor, and musician are among the occupations to which they gravitate.<sup>17</sup> In these occupations, the personality style of hysterics can be put to good use. Furthermore, many of these occupations are characterized by an occupational milieu in which an hysteric's fear of deep involvement or entrapment can be kept at bay. Rarely do these occupations entail long-term affiliation with an employer, such as would be the case in a bureaucracy.

### Impulsive Personality Style

The images of the "buccaneer" or the "entrepreneur" are appropriate illustrations of this personality type, as exemplified by the Carnegies, Rockefellers,

Mellons, and Rhodes. They represent individuals willing to take high risks, acting intuitively and somewhat carelessly. This personality type—"charismatic capitalists" to use Weber's term—has attracted the attention of sociologists because of the role such individuals have played in the development of early capitalism (Gerth and Mills 1946, p. 67). As Schumpeter ([1942]1950, pp. 131–134) observed, entrepreneurs fail unless they have an entrepreneurial spirit, an inner drive to take risks and be innovative. This quality, he noted, seems to be eroding with the advance of a bureaucratized and depersonalized society.

Impulsive personalities are characterized by intense attention, directed toward short-term practical interests and concerns. They want things to happen right away, and have little tolerance for frustration. Long-range planning, abstract thinking, or reflection are weak traits among these individuals. Unlike hysterical personalities, their cognitive skills are oriented toward the practical, competent execution of concrete tasks (Shapiro 1965, p. 140).

Individuals with impulsive personality styles are "doers". Unlike the obsessive-compulsive type, they appear self-confident and free of inhibitions or anxiety. Their practical orientation makes them into "pragmatists." While they may be perceived by others as cynical, their own subjective interpretation is one of being guided by "good practical sense." They are egocentric and unself-critical. They have weak moral standards and feel little moral responsibility (weak super-ego functions). Impulsive individuals' presentation of self is often glib or ostentatious. They seem to be forever "operating," to maximize some immediate gain. Fabrication and lying are naturally incorporated in maneuvering and are experienced as strategies that "make sense."

Impulsive personality types use defenses such as *disassociation* and *delusional projection*. Disassociation, unlike repression, affects perception of objective reality more than perception of internal feelings. Impulsive individuals are likely to flatly deny the existence of objective constraints ("nothing can stop me!").<sup>18</sup> Disassociation often includes the use of fantasy, sometimes delusional projections that can take the form of new creative visions. The entrepreneur's vision of new ways of making money, of corporate takeovers, and high stakes gambits, show aspects of delusional fantasy.

Occupations that attract impulsive personality styles are characterized by high risk-taking, immediate gratification, "amoral" value-orientation, and short-term planning. Entrepreneurs of all sorts, businessmen and investors come to mind. While they are likely to be found throughout the business world, their sphere of predilection is what is called "venture capitalism," where they are less hampered by bureaucratic constraints. These occupations provide a culture that rewards and reinforces risk taking and immediate financial gain, as well as manipulation and projection. Stockbroker, for example, provides a work context in which quick gains, short-term decisions, and risk-taking are all normative. Based on the DOT (see note 11), other occupations that are likely to reward impulsive character types are publicity writer and advertising salesman.

## Narcissistic Personality Style

Narcissistic character types have an inflated sense of self, a need for full attention, constant support, adulation, and admiration, all of which cover a sense of vulnerability and lack of individuation (Kernberg 1975). Grandiose fantasies of success and recognition form the core of the narcissistic self, combined with manipulative tactics used to achieve one's goals. Unlike obsessive-compulsives, narcissistic individuals will not fight or compete openly for what they want. They use manipulation and self-deceit to achieve their goal of being loved and accepted.

Narcissistic personalities look constantly for social recognition and admiration. They are anxious to be seen with the right people, to know the influential figures in their field. There is an overemphasis on grooming and retaining a youthful appearance. Their intense work habits and achievements cover a sense of identity confusion and inner emptiness described by Winnicott (1965) as a "false self" and by Kohut (1971) as an "as-if-personality." Their inner drive to accomplish and produce is based on a need to please, rather than a desire to sublimate sexual and aggressive impulses. Because they desperately want to please, even to placate in order to be loved, their work is derivative rather than original.<sup>19</sup>

Narcissistic personalities easily get injured when they cannot obtain enough narcissistic supplies. In their personal relationships, feelings of intimacy are quickly followed by disappointment (narcissistic injuries), which, in turn, leads to feelings of unworthiness, the search for a new relationship and a further source of narcissistic supplies. Their sense of self-importance and "uniqueness" is pervasive, and coupled with an expectation of special treatment which interferes with their ability to empathize. Narcissistic personalities will go out of their way to help others and be solicitous, but it is an attempt to claim both attention for themselves and secure approval while counteracting an image of self-centeredness.

A striking feature of narcissistic personalities is the swing between an overidealized sense of self and feelings of unworthiness and devaluation. Intellectual abilities and achievement tend to be alternately overestimated and underestimated. High achievement aspirations and ego ideals create a constant inner pressure, followed by depression—as a form of repressed anger—when such aspirations and ideals are not met. Narcissistic personalities use defenses that give support to their inflated self-image. *Primitive-idealization*—holding overly optimistic and idealized views of one's relationship with significant others—is a major defense. They also use *self-deception* and *splitting* to keep separate the "good" and "bad" parts of the self.

Narcissistic personality types are likely to be found in occupations that stress visibility and public recognition, occupations in which self-aggrandizement and self-preoccupation are seen as legitimate. Narcissistic personalities perform poorly in competitive situations. They want the limelight and attention but they do not enjoy the competitive process and are constantly nursing narcissistic

wounds. Narcissistic personalities tend to do well in occupations that tolerate unconventional and eccentric behavior (unusual ways to attract attention), with built-in audiences onto which their aggrandizing self-images can be projected. Political, religious, and academic arenas often provide contexts in which narcissistic individuals can use their personality traits and defenses to advantage. The style of functioning, for example, of charismatic political leaders (e.g., Huey Long) and evangelical religious leaders (e.g., Jimmy and Tammy Baker) reward and reinforce public adulation, self-aggrandizement, and dependency relations in a relatively protected environment.<sup>20</sup>

### Bureaucratic Organization and Occupational Attainment

In corporate settings, work is often subdivided in a way that is suitable for different personality types. Consider the organization of stock portfolio management. This activity is usually divided into a research aspect—to uncover the health and prognosis of a company (long-term fundamentals)—and a brokerage aspect. The latter involves quick decisions based on market trends, in which a few stocks, selected by the research staff, are followed. The research activity, requiring systematic sifting of material, is in line with an obsessive-compulsive style. The brokerage activity is more suitable for an impulsive style. Organizations sometimes make the mistake of promoting the successful research person to a brokerage position, not realizing that the determinants of success are more subtle than an evaluation of past performance, and require more than ambition and the acquisition of appropriate job skills.

More generally, one consequence of the present perspective on occupational attainment, as remarked earlier, would be a modification of the so called "Peter Principle," the notion that individuals rise to a level just *above* their competence. The Peter Principle presumes that with each promotion increasing demands are made on intellectual skills; at some point the individual has been advanced to a level that exceeds his/her cognitive capabilities. In contrast, we suggest that, in many careers, certain promotions involve a qualitative shift in duties and job demands, necessitating a different character type (e.g., advancement from engineer to manager, from advertising agent to account executive). It is this mismatch with personality, which may occur in a job shift, that often is responsible for the decline in performance quality (Bingham and Davis 1924).

## DEFENSES AS UNIVERSAL DETERMINANTS OF OCCUPATIONAL SUCCESS

The theoretical ideas just discussed relied on a psychoanalytic model that emphasizes stable character types (Reich 1933), a labor market model that stresses the sorting of individuals among occupational lines, and an assessment of the consequences of a match or mismatch between character structure and an occupations'



“temperaments”—to use the DOT’s own term. Specific defenses—(unconscious) strategies for coping with anxiety—are associated with each character type, and were noted in the various character descriptions.

There are reasons to believe that defenses play a more central role in the attainment process than the one attributed to them in the preceding account; in particular, that they are *global* predictors of attainment. Defenses can be conceptualized as following a developmental sequence based on an individual’s vicissitudes of psychosexual maturation (Freud [1926]1959b; Freud [1937]1966; Deutsch [1934]1965). When confronted with anxiety stemming from perceived dangers—oral deprivation, fear of abandonment, loss of love, castration fears—children draw upon defenses available at their developmental stage to minimize the discomfort. Freud ([1922]1958) pointed out that the type of defenses characteristic of adult functioning can be used as a diagnostic tool to detect pathological states and unresolved psychic conflicts.

With respect to occupational attainment, there is reason to expect that individuals with mature defenses (mature in terms of stage of psychosexual development) adjust more easily to the requirements of adult social roles. The more developed and stronger the ego, the greater the ability to adapt to the demands of adult functioning (Symonds 1945; Bibring 1961; Semrad 1967; Vaillant 1971).<sup>21</sup> In turn, we suggest that, the weaker the ego structure, the less likely that an individual will be successful *in most any occupation*. By regressing to early emotional states, expressing child-like feelings such as shame or humiliation, or by exhibiting pathological defenses, an individual may find it difficult to carry out work roles satisfactorily.

Vaillant (1971; 1986, pp. 110–111) has proposed a theoretical classification of defenses based on Freud’s ([1937]1966) analysis of defense mechanisms. He classifies defenses into four categories: *psychotic* (delusional projection, psychotic distortion), *immature* (denial, splitting, acting out, passive–aggressivity, projection), *neurotic* (displacement, repression, intellectualization, reaction-formation) and *mature* (sublimation, suppression, altruism, humor).<sup>22</sup> Based on clinical material, Vaillant (1986) is able to show that the maturity of a subject’s defenses correlates (inversely) with scales measuring objective psychopathology and (directly) with scales measuring adaptation to the external environment.

Vaillant (1976) suggests, on the basis of a longitudinal study of 95 cases, that differences in defenses are a major reason why men who were similar in education, intelligence, and social class, should have experienced great disparities in vocational success. Also using clinical materials, Hann (1963) and Weinstock (1967) have reported that upwardly-mobile individuals tend to be obsessive, and utilize the defense mechanisms of suppression and repression. Snarey and Vaillant (1985) demonstrate, in a longitudinal study of 278 working-class boys over three generations, the role of various ego defense mechanisms in predicting upward mobility. Controlling for IQ and background variables, their results confirm previous research that showed a positive correlation between maturity of defenses and social mobility.

From a sociological point of view, *immature* defenses do not fit the requirements of work in complex organizations. Demonstrativeness, open expression of emotions, acting out rather than verbalizing, rebellion against authority, and schizoid denial (denial of reality), all seem to run counter to organizational requirements and bureaucratic regulations. Employees who act out their anger or frustration at the supervisor, who project their negative feelings onto their fellow workers or customers, who get deeply depressed for being rebuked or criticized, are less likely to be successful than those who suppress, displace, or deny their feelings.

Repression, intellectualization, compromise formation, and displacement (*neurotic* defenses) are consistent with organizational demands for efficiency, order, and submissiveness. Individuals whose defenses allow them to respond with restraint (even mild depression) rather than with emotional outburst or paralyzing anxiety are more likely to be perceived by their superiors as reliable and responsible workers. In other words, neurotic defenses are institutionally rewarded and encouraged in modern bureaucratic settings.

Thus, everything else being equal, we expect neurotic defense structures, along with mature defense structures, to be positively associated with successful career outcomes in a wide range of work environments and occupational fields. Correspondingly, we expect immature defense structures—that is, psychic structures with a high proportion of early defenses such as projection, acting out and denial—to be negatively related to successful career outcomes. How mature, neurotic, and immature defenses, in various combinations and configurations, might influence occupational success remains to be addressed.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

The existence of unconscious processes affecting behavior has been argued in numerous clinical works, starting with Freud, and demonstrated in some experimental research (e.g., Gabriel 1986; Silverman 1983; and Wolman 1984). In this paper, we have taken for granted the existence of unconscious processes and have focused on the study of their behavioral manifestations. The expression of unconscious desires and wishes contrasts with attitudes and opinions which reflect a conscious understanding of oneself and the world. Unconscious wishes, desires, and psychic conflicts are typically expressed in the form of symptoms and defenses, and are reflected in an individual's character structure.

### The Measurement of Ego Defenses

Behavioral expression of unconscious wishes and intrapsychic conflicts can be studied in two ways: One way is to study which adaptive defenses are used to

keep anxiety in check; the other way is to examine symptom formation when adaptive defenses can no longer contain the anxiety and give way to regressive tendencies. (Both formulations have been addressed in a recent empirical study by Swanson 1988.) We briefly describe what we believe to be the most useful instruments for measuring adaptive and regressive defenses.

The identification of adaptive defenses, which govern our daily lives, requires measurement of defenses as an integral part of the personality. This can be done by a variety of methods. The most common techniques are projective tests like the Rorschach, the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and Sentence Completion Tests (Loevinger and Wessler 1970). Projective tests are the most useful tools for uncovering unconscious feelings and defenses to cope with anxiety. They have been used by social psychologists and sociologists in combination with other techniques, such as the clinical interview (Frenkel-Brunswik 1950, pp. 226–275; Roe 1946, 1956; Fromm and Maccoby 1970; Maccoby 1976). The administration and interpretation of projective tests is time consuming and difficult. It requires the use of highly-skilled coders, making it impractical in large-scale surveys.

There are other scales for measuring adaptive defenses. Semrad et al. (1973), created an *Ego Profile Scale* that empirically measured different types of ego functioning. The items of the questionnaire were classified into nine ego defense categories by 25 psychiatrists. *The Coping Operation Preference Enquiry* (Consulting Psychologists 1980) is an instrument which includes a variety of scales measuring denial, isolation, projection, dependency, and turning-against-the-self.

There also exist diagnostic procedures for assessing regressive defenses—regression to oral dependency, withdrawal, destructive rage, depressive and schizoid tendencies (Kernberg 1980, pp. 211–276). The breakdown of adaptive defense mechanisms during periods of crisis was analyzed by Vaillant (1976) in a study of 95 men that were followed for 30 years. Each man's behavior at a time of crisis and conflict was recorded as a vignette; about 20 vignettes were collected for each man and coded by two judges. The judges labelled the vignettes according to a glossary of defenses. The overall maturity of a defensive style was used to predict psychological, social, and career adjustment. Issues of measurement, reliability, and cross-validation in the empirical studies of defenses are discussed in Vaillant (1986) and in Vaillant, Bond and Vaillant (1986).

To our knowledge there is only one questionnaire that is used to self-assess the existence of different types of defenses, *The Self-Report of Defensive Styles* created by Bond et al. (1983). It is a questionnaire designed to elicit manifestations of a subject's characteristic style of dealing with anxiety, based on the assumption that persons can accurately comment on their own behavior. The questionnaire is made up of 97 statements, designed to reflect behavior that is suggestive of 25 detailed defenses. The questionnaire was checked for face validity and consistency but has yet to be standardized. Bond et al. (1983) have

done a factor analysis of the 25 defenses, yielding four major defensive styles that are similar to Shapiro's styles of functioning. Recently a shorter version of Bond's questionnaire was constructed by Andrews, Pollock and Stewart (1989).

### Formulation and Measurement of the Character Types

Personality type is a more problematic concept than defensive style. Broadly speaking, defenses are coping strategies for self and social control, and classifications of defenses—whether based on presumed developmental stage (Vaillant 1986, pp. 110–111) or on functionality (e.g., “adaptive” versus “regressive”)—are little more than descriptive groupings. There is no implication that the constituent defenses form an integrated structure, that defenses can coalesce into only a limited number of configurations, or that individuals can be classified in terms of defense categories.

The personality types are of a different conceptual order. Here, there is a presumption of integration among the component traits,<sup>23</sup> of temporal stability, and of the utility of the schema for classifying individuals.<sup>24</sup> These assumptions have been questioned (see House 1981 and Mischel 1976 for reviews). There are also questions about which personality categories to use and, indeed, of whether a dimensional formulation might not be preferable to a taxonomic scheme.

### *Stability of Personality Characteristics*

In the late 1960s, in a series of influential papers, Mischel raised questions about the stability of personality traits and the predictability of behavior (1968, 1969, 1973). Mischel noted that people do not behave consistently across diverse situations, that reliable inferences about behavior cannot be made from personality traits, and that the traits, themselves, often exhibit low stability when measured at multiple occasions. He concluded that “highly generalized behavioral consistencies have not been demonstrated, and the concept of personality traits as broad response predispositions is thus untenable” (1968, p. 146).

Mischel's contention provided an impetus for a reassessment of personality formulations: how personality should be conceptualized—whether on the basis of underlying traits (type of person model), or dispositions acquired through social reinforcement (behavioral model), or as an interaction between a personality “core” and life events (see Bem [1988]; Snyder and Ickes [1985] for reviews). With respect to the stability of personality features, Mischel's assessment was never without its critics (e.g., McClelland 1981; Moss and Sussman 1980; Costa and McCrea 1984). Some contrary results were developed from modest technical revisions to existing research procedures—for example, corrections for attenuation and aggregation of events to reduce response fluctuations (Epstein 1979; Costa and McCrea 1980). More significant findings have emerged from paradigmatic reassessments in regard to where stability should be sought:

the distinction between core (genotypic) personality and surface traits (Gangestad and Snyder 1985; Moss and Sussman 1980), between objective features of a situation and those perceived by the subject as pertinent (Hogan 1987).

Recent formulations have also attempted to take account of the multiple behaviors which may be consistent with a given personality trait, depending on the context. This point is especially relevant to evaluating stability in the case of a bipolar syndrome (e.g., passive-aggressivity), in which contradictory behavior is built into the construct, although Moss and Sussman (1980) make clear that similar issues arise with regard to simple traits. It has also been argued that the notion of "consistency" may be preferable to "stability" when examining behaviors (or personality traits) over long time periods. Thus, Block (1981, p. 35) speaks of "lawful developmental changes" from early character structure to later character structure. Similarly, McClelland notes that men at varying stages of maturity will express their power drive differently; as a consequence, in a population sample, the correlation between power drive and any given behavioral expression will be low (1981, pp. 101-102). As an elaboration of the notion of stability, these studies have led to formulations that involve matching traits or dispositions with an *equivalence class* of behaviors.

### *Sociological Formulations and Stability*

There are themes in personality research which are uniquely sociological—a focus on issues of self-concept, esteem, identity, values; a concern with processes such as socialization, social learning, and the impact of life events (House 1981; DiRenzo 1977). The interests of sociologists are basically ones of exploring the linkage between personality and social context; not surprisingly, this has meant: (1) a preoccupation with issues of change and influence between personality variables and features of social institutions; and (2) a focus on personality traits that are fairly mutable, rather than on deeper, genotypic traits. See, however, Elder and Caspi (1988) and Bem (1988) for discussions that are as much concerned with continuity of personality styles as with change.<sup>25</sup>

The influential formulations of Kohn and Schooler (1981, 1983) are instructive on this score; see Spenner (1988) for a critical review. Kohn and Schooler report significant effects of work conditions on personality; however, the variables they examine are hardly "master personality dimensions," as noted by Spenner (1988, p. 83). For instance, one focus of their research concerns the impact of a job's "substantive complexity" on "ideational flexibility" (Kohn and Schooler 1983, pp. 114-123). Ideational flexibility is based on the factor loadings of items such as "respondent's propensity to agree with agree-disagree questions," and "impressing the interviewer as being an intelligent person" (Kohn and Schooler 1983, p. 38). This sort of measure hardly taps deep personality style, as described in the present paper, so it is not surprising that "ideational flexibility" is influenced by one's work environment. What is surprising

is that the impact of work environment is not larger; the 10-year stability coefficient for ideational flexibility is four times the size of the effect of substantive complexity upon that term (1983, p. 116).

### *Specification of Personality Categories*

If stability is enhanced at the level of the personality core and by considering broad dispositions rather than specific traits, this is one reason for using a typological scheme at the genotypic level. There still remains the question of which formulation of personality types to use. Holland (1985, pp. 15–33), for example, has defined six personality types such as “realistic,” “social,” and “enterprising,” which are intended to be matched with similarly labeled work environments. Sternberg (1988, pp. 275–295) speaks of *intellectual styles*—for example, “executive,” “judicial”—which are characterizations of managerial dispositions. These categories have the apparent advantage of having been devised for the purpose of explicating work career processes. Yet we consider them unattractive precisely because the personality types were formulated with an eye toward specific applications. The categories are tied to the workings of a particular social institution and were not derived from considerations of general personality processes.<sup>26</sup>

The character types in this paper are based on the DSM III-R (American Psychiatric Association 1987) personality disorders. The DSM classification is not derived from psychoanalytic theory, or from the views of any single therapeutic school, and the DSM avoids discussion of the *etiology* of personality characteristics—which is the main locus of theoretical disagreement.<sup>27</sup> “Clinicians and researchers can agree on the identification of mental disorders on the basis of their clinical manifestations without agreeing on how the disturbances come about” (1987, p. xxiii). The DSM personality categories focus on “enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and oneself . . . [which] generally are recognizable by adolescence or early adult life and are characteristic of most of adult life” (American Psychiatric Association 1987, pp. 335–336). While the categories are based on the formulations of clinicians, they have been subject to field research<sup>28</sup> and revised periodically to improve validity and increase diagnostic reliability (American Psychiatric Association 1987, p. xx).<sup>29</sup>

### *Measurement of the Character Types*

The DSM categories are intended for clinical diagnosis, but some interview protocols and questionnaire instruments exist for personality assessment in terms of this formulation. Morey, Vaught, and Blashfield (1985), using the MMPI self-report items, have constructed scales for the 11 personality disorders described in DSM-III; reliability coefficients are reported in the paper. The Personality Adjective Check List (PACL) has also been used to yield self-report measures for 11

Millon personality styles, which are similar to the DSM categories. To date, validity evidence is limited to studies of the correspondence between PACL and other self-report measures (Strack 1987).

Although the DSM categories were formulated as a tool for diagnosing personality disorders, it is generally accepted that character pathologies "reflect extremes of underlying dimensions of normal personality traits" (Wiggins and Pincus 1989; also see Moss and Magaro 1989). Indeed, this appears to be the position of the DSM committee (American Psychiatric Association 1987, p. xxii). As a consequence, the DSM personality taxonomy has been employed in a number of studies with normal populations (e.g. Wiggins and Pincus 1989; Strack 1987; Romney and Bynner 1989). Analogously, there is no requirement that the personality categories be formulated as discrete entities<sup>30</sup> (American Psychiatric Association 1987, p. xxii); though, in this paper, for simplicity, we have downplayed the issue of severity of a personality disorder.

## CONCLUSIONS

Sociological theories of attainment have been singularly unsuccessful in explaining career choice and career change. The principal approach to these questions has involved the notion of "matching," in which workers and their relevant characteristics are linked with jobs and their significant features. We have no problem with this formulation as a generic sort of explanation, however, it is operationalized narrowly in the stratification literature. The characteristics of workers that have been considered—principally, ability and education—are incapable of explaining *detailed* occupational choice. These variables relate to *level* of cognitive development and are relevant to understanding the matching process only in terms of some hierarchical dimension of occupations such as status or earnings. The "horizontal" aspect of the question—choice of detailed occupation, given educational attainment—has been largely unexplored.

In the sociological literature, choice of *detailed* occupation is addressed only in terms of the mechanism of "occupational inheritance," the tendency for sons to enter the occupations of their fathers. This occupational selection is explained in terms of intergenerational value transmission, familiarity with father's occupation, or the ability of fathers to facilitate an offspring's access to their own career line (e.g., entrance into a craft union, admission to medical school). However, this theme can only be the *residue* of a theory of occupational choice, not the operative mechanism. Given the rarity of occupational inheritance (at the level of detailed occupations), a systematic theory cannot be built upon this explanatory edifice.

The operative mechanism in our formulation is, again, a matching process. But workers and jobs are viewed multidimensionally, with the characteristics of workers conceptualized as "integrated bundles" of personality traits, in which

unconscious needs and psychic defenses interact with job features. The joining of this sociological process—labor market features and career development—with psychoanalytic concepts and categories such as character structure and defense mechanisms permits issues to be explored which appear intractable in a purely sociological framework, such as choice of detailed occupation, attainment in different lines of work, and the precariousness of attainment after a promotion that entails a significant change in occupational duties.

*Character structure* refers to “general style of functioning.” From psychoanalytic theory and clinical observation there is reason to believe that certain personality styles are adaptive—or maladaptive—in particular occupational contexts. Unlike traditional psychoanalytic approaches that have analyzed pathological manifestations of character disorders, we are suggesting that personality disorders—especially mild (neurotic) levels—are not necessarily handicaps. They become assets in social contexts that reward and reinforce specific character structures. The second concept, *defense mechanism*, relates to a global predictor of occupational attainment, and suggests that individuals with mature defense structures are more likely to be successful than those with immature structures. Unlike character styles, this effect is universal, not occupation specific.

Our formulation suggests that, at different ranks in an organization, particular character traits and defense mechanisms will be rewarded. At low levels of an organization, personality traits and defenses such as obsessive-compulsiveness and repression are normatively valued, since they tend to reinforce conformity to organizational regulations. At higher levels of the organization, individuals are expected to engage in supervision and decision making, and negotiate with representatives of other corporations. These tasks require a different style of functioning and the use of defenses such as paranoia, passive-aggressivity, and splitting. We are not saying that these personality traits are the sole, or even the primary determinant of performance in executive positions, rather that they play an important role.

The broad implication of this perspective is that certain personality types function well in particular work contexts, but not in others. As an extension of this formulation to a different role domain, one can expect major differences in the way personality styles respond to the competing demands of family and work. Personality traits and defense mechanisms which are functional in the workplace, can become a source of tension and an impediment to personal communication in the family and in personal relationships.

To illustrate this last theme: The obsessive-compulsive personality responds with eagerness to the demands and constraints of work life, but with annoyance to the emotional demands of family life. Marital and parental tasks—as compared with occupational tasks—are diffuse, rooted in mutual obligations, not clearly definable and informal. Family and intimate relationships are based on expectations of sharing, emotional intimacy, a certain open endedness and toler-



ance of unpredictable events, such as a child's illness. These are experienced by an obsessive-compulsive as intrusive demands and threatening pressures. Emotional distance and remoteness allow the obsessive-compulsive personality to feel in control and to keep family problems at bay, while investing emotional energies in the area of work (LaBier 1984; Eiduson 1962, p. 114). In short, obsessive—compulsive neurotic traits are not easily rewarded in the family, encouraging obsessive-compulsives to spend less time with family and more time in work-related activities.

In contrast, the narcissistic individual uses the family as an arena in which dominant personality traits and defenses can be rewarded. Narcissistic personalities idealize their spouse (partner) and children, projecting onto them their own visions of success, often manipulating them to satisfy their own unfulfilled personal needs and wishes (Miller 1981). The family becomes an arena for self-aggrandizement. The narcissistic personality type, unlike the obsessive-compulsive, requires a constant involvement with family members. It should be noted, that the emotional investment of the narcissist in family life is not cost free for spouse and children, since all too often they are the source of "narcissistic supplies." An analysis of the extent to which family and work make conflicting emotional demands, ones in which the various personality traits may fare differently, remains to be undertaken.

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## NOTES

1. It should be noted that the sociopsychological variables in the model refer to cognitive structures rather than to emotional conflicts.
2. Such an agenda for research was put forward by Merton 50 years ago in an article "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality" (1940).
3. In psychoanalytic theory, as we later explain, the defenses associated with a lower-class style develop early in the maturation of a child, whereas the defenses associated with a middle-class style develop at later stages of psychosexual maturation. Defenses—which refer to (unconscious) strategies for responding to anxiety—are similar to the notion of "coping styles" (Shanan and Jacobowitz 1982).
4. It should be pointed out that the existence of a stable psychic structure does not imply rigidity

of behavior. An individual's character structure is made up of an integrated bundle of personality traits and defenses. The configuration that is expressed will vary with the socioemotional context. For example, paranoid traits can be accentuated, or muted, depending on the environment. Also, while character style, in psychoanalytic theory, is viewed as developing mainly in childhood and adolescence, and thereafter being resilient, the intensity of neurotic symptoms associated with a character type can be reduced, though with difficulty (Fenichel 1945, pp. 539–540); indeed, this is one objective of psychotherapy.

5. Secondary traits play a crucial role in creative work. In a study of research scientists, Eiduson (1962) shows that the difference between merely competent and creative researchers stems from the role played by secondary traits such as paranoid tendencies, what Eiduson calls "the paranoid leap" (p. 133).

6. The major defenses are:

- *projection* (attributing one's own unacknowledged feelings to others);
- *repression* (pushing feelings and thoughts out of consciousness);
- *reaction-formation* (expressing affects diametrically opposed to those which are experienced);
- *displacement* (redirecting feeling to a less cared for person);
- *denial* (denying of external reality);
- *acting out* (behavioral expression of an impulse or unconscious wish in order to avoid being conscious of the affect that accompanies it);
- *masochism* (self-devaluation);
- *sublimation* (channelling instincts into creative activity);
- *suppression* (the decision to postpone giving attention to a conscious impulse or conflict);
- *splitting* (keeping separate the "good breast" and the "bad breast" in an attempt to avoid ambivalent feelings); and
- *primitive idealization* (holding overly optimistic and idealized views of one's relationship with significant others).

7. Apprenticeship programs would appear to play a similar role, filtering students who chose a vocational track.

8. In Kohn and Schooler (1983, Table 3.5) the reverse or "socialization" effects are larger than the impact of *psychological functioning* on the job feature, *substantive complexity*. However, those entries are based on reciprocal effects in a contemporaneous relationship (cross-sectional model). In a replication, using longitudinal data, the impact of the personality variables on job conditions generally exceed the reverse effects (Kohn and Schooler 1983, Table 6.4).

9. The concept of "emotional intelligence" should not be confused with the concept of "practical intelligence" which measures the ability to manage one's own career, solving technical and social problems (Sternberg 1988).

10. "The term neurotic disorder . . . refers to a mental disorder in which the predominant disturbance is a symptom or group of symptoms that is distressing to the individual and is recognized by him or her as unacceptable and alien (ego-dystonic); reality testing is grossly intact; behavior does not actively violate gross social norms although functioning may be markedly impaired. . . ." (American Psychiatric Association 1980, pp. 9–10).

11. The examples presented in this paper were chosen with the aid of the *The Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (U.S. Department of Labor 1981, pp. 44–45). Specifically, to obtain a rough assessment of the cognitive and emotional skill requirements of different jobs, we sorted occupations according to the 10 temperament variables (variables 112–121). Variable 113 ("situations involving the interpretation of feelings, ideas or facts in terms of personal view point") was used as an indicator that the occupation values temperaments associated with a hysterical character type. Variable 116 ("adaptability in making generalizations, judgments or decisions based on measurable or verifiable criteria") and 120 were used to associate occupational requirements with an obsessive-compulsive character style; variables 114 and 117 were associated with an impulsive character; and variable 119

with a paranoid character type. We would like to thank Andrea Tyree for bringing the temperament variables of the DOT to our attention and suggesting modes of analysis with these variables.

12. The importance of personality style for occupational attainment is actually well-appreciated. This is especially evident in biographies of businessmen, scientists and statesmen, in which specific character traits—delusion, grandiosity, paranoia, or perseverance—are emphasized. (Erikson 1969; Jardim 1970).

13. Lack of emotional involvement among obsessive-compulsives does not necessarily lead to family instability (separation or divorce), as it is accompanied by other traits—responsibility, seriousness, and job stability—that reinforce family stability (Vaillant 1977).

14. These are occupations that scored high on variables 116 and 120 of the “temperament” construct in *The Dictionary of Occupational Titles*. See note 11 for details.

15. A good example of this is the analysis of President Johnson’s paranoid tendencies in “Lyndon Johnson: The War Within” (Goodwin 1988, pp. 35–48).

16. Very rough estimates from the DOT, using variable 119, suggest that the following occupations would reward paranoid personality types: marshal, sheriff, airline pilot, executive. See note 11 for details.

17. These occupations, illustrative of ones in which hysterical personality traits might prove an asset, were selected on the basis of having high values on variable 113 of the DOT. See note 11 for details.

18. Kets de Vries (1980, pp. 111–132) in his discussion of the “entrepreneurial personality” describes manipulative and irrational behavior among such executives.

19. These features of the narcissistic personality reflect pre-oedipal rather than oedipal processes.

20. According to the DOT, occupations that provide a work content in which narcissistic traits are likely to be rewarded include clergyman, university professor, public relations officer, lawyer and judge. See note 11 for details.

21. The ego has traditionally been conceptualized as the locus of reality testing. Individuals with weak egos tend to regress easily. Regression can take the form of submissiveness, dependency, outbursts of rage and anger and is usually accompanied by feelings of shame and humiliation.

22. Psychotic defenses are omitted from the following discussion as they are not typical of individuals who can function in everyday life.

23. In psychoanalytic theory, the character types are seen as “self-maintaining” systems, perpetuated through selective perception, compartmentalization, and use of other defenses to avoid overwhelming anxiety (Shapiro 1965, ch. 7; Fenichel 1945, ch. 20). As Moss and Sussman (1980, p. 589) note, “the resistance of many psychological symptoms to prodigious psychotherapeutic efforts . . . provides compelling evidence for personality stability.” It is difficult to change character structure because, at some level, the “solution” works for the individual.

24. In psychoanalytic formulations, there is an implication of a finite number of personality patterns, that not all combinations of personality traits are equally likely or even possible (Millon 1986, p. 675).

25. Elder and Caspi (1980, pp. 96–99) and Bem (1988, pp. 207–214) emphasize social reinforcement and internalization mechanisms that serve to maintain stability of personality features. Yet, they also are aware of the importance of intrapsychic processes (Bem 1988, pp. 213–214).

26. In both Holland (1985) and Sternberg (1988) there is only a limited appreciation of the linkages among an individual’s constellation of traits and their arrangement into a stable character structure, of their relation to defense mechanisms, or of the dynamics of their expression.

27. The DSM personality categories represent a consensus view of an expert committee; their construction is analogous to the formulation of the “worker trait characteristics” in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (Cain and Treiman 1981).

28. The initial version of the DSM manual was published by the American Psychiatric Associa-

tion in 1952 and has since gone through three revisions. In 1977, in formulating DSM III, NIMH-sponsored field trials were carried out with 12,667 patients. Several hundred individuals were evaluated by pairs of clinicians, in order to assess diagnostic reliability. The results, presented in Appendix F of DSM III (American Psychiatric Association 1980, p. 5), generally indicate acceptable reliability values.

29. The categories have also been a focus of methodological study and substantive investigation. There have been analyses, for example, of the "distance" among the DSM character types in some appropriate hyperspace (Romney and Bynner 1989); factor analysis has been applied to the DSM categories in order to uncover more basic dimensions of personality (Widdiger et al. 1987; Kass et al. 1985), and these results have been compared with the dimensions derived from other approaches to the study of personality (Wiggins and Pincus 1989).

30. In sociological research, personality is commonly described in terms of variables, rather than categories; in the psychological literature both formulations are in use, with much discussion over the merits of each approach (Block 1981; Gangsted and Snyder 1985; Widdiger et al. 1987). There is also a literature about "personality prototypes," in which the intent is to both assign categorical membership and assess the degree of inclusion in the category—for example, how typical an individual is of a particular diagnostic grouping (Livesley 1986, p. 728).

In general, a categorical scheme makes sense if we are speaking about broad dispositional styles, which reflect personality integration and are resistant to change, and which characterize individuals over long periods of adult life. We have suggested that there is evidence for such stability at the level of the core personality. Further, a taxonomic scheme makes sense if there is reason to expect particular stimuli to have different effects on behavior, according to the personality category. In this regard, it is relevant that individuals of, for example, paranoid and hysterical dispositions have disparate psychic needs, perceive the same situations differently, and respond with characteristic and distinct styles.

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