Applying Social Cognitive Career Theory to the Empowerment of Battered Women

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Despite increasing attention to the problem of domestic violence and its multifaceted consequences, the career development needs of battered women have only sporadically been addressed in the vocational psychology literature. In this article, the scope and consequences of domestic violence are reviewed, highlighting effects on women’s career and educational well-being. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT; R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, & G. Hackett, 1994) is described and applied to the experiences of women living in domestic violence situations. A framework for empowering battered women and using SCCT to promote their career development and attainment is provided, along with recommendations for future research.

During the past 30 years, the issues of domestic violence and battered women have received increasing attention both nationally and globally through media campaigns, legislation initiatives, and research conducted in disciplines such as criminal justice, social science, and women’s studies (Ellsberg, Caldera, Herrera, Winkvist, & Kullgren, 1999; Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Ispeel & Pick, 1999; Gelles, 1997; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Horne, 1999; Kozu, 1999; P.T. McWhirter, 1999; Walker, 1999). The existing literature on the consequences of domestic violence has informed practice by describing the emergency safety and personal counseling needs of battered women, as well as best practices for the provision of mental health and advocacy services in shelters, hospitals, legal systems, and community centers (Browne, 1993; Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999; Weisz, Tulman, & Bennett, 1998). Although this literature base has grown tremendously in the past decade, little attention has been given to the longer term impact of domestic violence on battered women’s career development and the role of career counseling and intervention in assisting women with longer term recovery. The purpose of this article is to highlight the effects of domestic violence on women’s vocational and educational well-being. Constructs and tenets of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) are described and applied to the ecology (i.e., sociocultural context) of battered women’s experiences. Finally, we provide a framework for empowering battered women and promoting their career development and attainment using SCCT.

Domestic violence has been characterized with respect to four dimensions of abuse: emotional, physical, sexual, and economic (Womenspace, 1998), and we attend to each of these dimensions in our discussion of social cognitive constructs, focusing more specifically on economic abuse. The terms vocational and career are used interchangeably throughout the article.

BATTERED WOMEN AND CAREER COUNSELING

A comprehensive review of four decades of research yielded only three articles that discussed guidelines and strategies for career counseling with battered women (Bowen, 1982; Gianakos, 1999; Ibrahim & Hery, 1987) and one article outlining battered women’s perceived career barriers and career decision-making self-efficacy (Brown, Reedy, Fountain, Johnson, & Dichiser, 2000). Many social service agencies that serve battered women provide valuable information about employment opportunities, job training, and, less frequently, vocational programs. This information is important because most battered women need immediate financial resources after leaving an abusive partner.

Although such resources often assist a battered woman to permanently leave a dangerous domestic situation, they do not restore longer term career and educational opportunities to battered women (Walsh & Osipow, 1994). Research shows that these longer term opportunities may be essential for women to provide for their family’s needs without their abuser’s contributions, to achieve economic independence, and ultimately to leave abusive situations permanently (Strube, 1988; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). A short-term employment focus also ignores the developmental nature of career and educational interests and pursuits, as well as the complex array of barriers that battered women face long

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this article, we define battered women as those who are or have been targets of domestic violence.

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after leaving an abusive relationship. Most important, the lack of attention to the effects of domestic violence on career development ignores the complex interrelationships between women's intimate partnerships and career interests and achievements. Given the critical importance of economic stability in allowing a woman to achieve and maintain a minimal standard of living and to leave an abusive situation permanently, attention to battered women's educational and career experiences, skills, interests, and goals is warranted.

Self-Efficacy Expectations

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy expectations influence the likelihood that an individual will attempt a behavior and persist in attempting that behavior in the face of difficulty. Self-efficacy expectations develop through performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, with performance accomplishments thought to be the most influential of these sources. The ecological context within which an individual functions influences the type and availability of these sources of self-efficacy.

For women living in domestic violence situations, learning experiences that enhance self-efficacy expectations may be limited. Perpetrators of domestic violence often isolate women in such a way that they become "hostages" in their own homes, cut off from their communities (Lobel, 1986; Morrow & Hawkhurst, 1989; Rosewater, 1993; Zambrano, 1985). As a result, opportunities to attempt and succeed at many educational and career-related tasks might be severely restricted or sabotaged. Likewise, physical isolation and financial limitations may reduce exposure to role models or peers engaged in educational and career pursuits. The impact of isolation can be particularly devastating for women of color, lesbians, and women with disabilities; for all of whom there are sometimes even fewer accessible role models and supportive community networks (Kanuha, 1994). The criticism, blaming, and systematic denigration that typically accompany domestic violence are a powerful source of verbal persuasion that the woman is incompetent across numerous, if not all, domains. She may believe that she cannot succeed in school or in a career area of interest because she is stupid, "crazy," and incapable. Finally, the physical state of battered women is often affected and dangerously threatened by their partner's abusive tactics. Battered women experience intense feelings of fear, anxiety, nervousness, and depression and may be subjected to repeated, and sometimes permanently debilitating, physical injuries during the course of an abusive relationship. Approximately 1.5 million women per year receive medical attention because of physical and sexual assaults by a male partner (Dutton, 1995). Abusers may prevent women from exercising regularly, eating nutritionally, and getting adequate sleep. Women with disabilities may be denied medication, health care, and access to assistive equipment such as wheelchairs. The physical states resulting from such abusive treatment may decrease the survivor's self-efficacy related to keeping or finding a job, performing job tasks, accomplishing educational and training goals, or performing successfully in any setting.

Outcome Expectations

Empirical research on career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations has consistently found a strong, positive association between the two (Gainor & Lent, 1998; Lopez, Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997; Smith & Foud, 1999). When self-efficacy expectations are low, outcome expectations are much more likely to be low. Career counseling and intervention literature on women who are members of oppressed
groups (e.g., lesbians, women of color, women who are incarcerated) indicates that under conditions of anticipated oppression or discrimination, outcome expectations may have a greater influence on interests than do self-efficacy beliefs (Chartrand & Rose, 1996; Morrow et al., 1996). Consistent with this notion, Sullivan (1991) noted that three factors seem to influence the decision of battered women to seek outside help: the severity of abuse, the number of resources a woman possesses, and a woman’s belief that such efforts will be successful.

A battered woman’s outcome expectations for education, work, or career-related activities are likely to be influenced by the anticipated response from her abuser. The abuser may engage in economic abuse, which falls along a continuum that includes making her ask for money, forcing her to hand over her paycheck, harassing her at work, and interfering with her educational and career pursuits (Koss et al., 1994). Recent estimates suggest that 75% of employed battered women are harassed in their work settings by their abusers, and 54% of these women lose their jobs as a result of this harassment (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). In a national survey examining women’s experiences of intimate violence, 40% of battered women reported that domestic abuse caused them to be late for work more than three times in the preceding month, 34% reported missing entire workdays, 23% reported difficulties advancing in their career, and 20% reported difficulties keeping their job (Retzlaff, 1999). The result is that domestic violence costs U.S. employers approximately $100 million a year in lost wages, sick leave, absenteeism, and nonproductivity (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Research also shows that domestic violence interferes with welfare recipients’ efforts to hold jobs and become self-sufficient (American Psychological Association [APA], 1998). Furthermore, approximately 25% to 48% of all homeless women are homeless after fleeing from an abusive relationship (Crowell & Burgess, 1996).

These negative outcomes may not only restrict battered women’s pursuit of personal and professional interests and lower their self-efficacy expectations but may also lower their expectations for positive outcomes in future career pursuits. Emotional and physical states of fear and anxiety as well as experiences of pain, discomfort, and shame may result in impaired job performance and absences from work. In turn, women’s absences from work may result in fewer opportunities for job skill development and mastery, position advancement, wage increases, and positive evaluations by supervisors. These data support the conclusion that women’s negative outcome expectations for work and career are a very realistic predictor of future failure.

In a comparable situation, battered women who are enrolled in academic courses may not be able to focus in class and successfully perform on tests, lowering both self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Abusers may prevent women from completing assignments, studying, and purchasing required educational materials. As experiences of negative emotions increase and job or academic performance and evaluations decline, battered women are likely to experience dissatisfaction (Chartrand, Rose, Elliott, Marmaro, & Caldwell, 1993; Decker & Borgen, 1993; Meldahl & Muchinsky, 1997). Women—and their abusers—may attribute their poor performance to a lack of innate ability and become convinced that, despite their efforts, career and educational success is impossible. This process is likely to foster both negative self-efficacy and outcome expectations, resulting in fewer and less persistent attempts to define and pursue vocational goals.

Career Interests and Choice Goals: Contextual Barriers and Supports

According to SCCT, self-efficacy and outcome expectations combine to influence the development of interests. In turn, interests influence the identification of and planning for career choice goals and actions (Lent et al., 1994). Living in a domestic violence situation, however, may not afford women the safety, time, and financial resources to explore their career interests, identify career goals, and take action to achieve those goals. Surviving from day to day is often the primary focus of their attention. When using SCCT to guide work with battered women, understanding the real and perceived barriers (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Swanson & Woitke, 1997) that battered women face when attempting to leave their abuser is as important as understanding how these barriers contribute to discrepancies between women’s career self-efficacy and outcome expectations and their actual career or educational interests and achievements (Swanson & Tokar, 1991). Battered women’s self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, and choice goals and actions related to leaving are often directly linked to their expectations for finding the support and resources they need to leave their abuser permanently and live a life free from violence. It seems logical then to first describe the SCCT constructs of barriers and supports with respect to making the choice to leave an abusive situation and acting on that choice and then to focus on barriers and supports to women’s development of career interests and choice goals.

Leaving an abusive situation is dangerous (Browne, 1987) and requires attention to immediate concerns such as physical safety, shelter, and money. Negative experiences with seeking help or failed attempts to leave an abuser decrease battered women’s self-efficacy and outcome expectations and, consequently, have a negative impact on women’s pursuit of their personal and professional interests and goals. The most dangerous time for a battered woman is after she leaves her abuser, because the abuser increases his or her use of violence in response to a perceived loss of control when a woman leaves (Jones, 1994). Empirical research on career barriers and supports for high school and college students suggests that supports may be a more important influence on career decisions than are barriers (Lent et al., 2000). The role played by supports and barriers in battered women’s decision to leave their abuser has received little empirical attention as yet (Strube, 1988; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999).

Women face many barriers when attempting to leave their abuser. Women may receive little support from their families and communities because leaving their partner is con-
sidered shameful and a violation of family values. Women of color may feel a sense of racial loyalty that translates into denial of both the violence perpetrated against them and their individual needs (Kanuha, 1994). Both women’s experiences of homophobia within family, community, and religious networks and society’s denial that lesbian domestic violence exists within lesbian communities make finding support very difficult for battered lesbians (Kanuha, 1994; Morrow & Haxhurst, 1989). Refugee and immigrant women, or those who are not yet legal residents of the United States, may be especially dependent on their partner and at greater risk for isolation because of language barriers and geographic distance from their family (Lum, 1998; Zambrano, 1985).

A lack of culturally appropriate social services also contributes to women’s perception of limited support options (Kanuha, 1994). Shortages in funding, space, and staff in domestic violence shelters and advocacy centers compound this problem. Public policy that is poorly informed and narrow in focus has the ultimate limiting effect on the number of resources made available to battered women and on the activities of police officers, court officials, and social services providers (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Dutton, 1995; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Kirkwood, 1993; Lyons & Kiesel, 1996; Viano, 1992). For example, welfare-to-work legislation approved under President Clinton’s administration (originally passed as The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) requires students on welfare who want and need an income to get a job, even if taking a job forces them to leave school. Although this legislation is intended to create a more educated workforce, it has prompted social service agency workers to advise welfare recipients to find jobs and drop out of college (APA, 1998). This legislation means that many battered women will be unable to receive financial assistance from the government while obtaining the education and training that would lead to greater financial independence in the future. This is of particular concern because according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (as cited in APA, 1998), the rate of intimate violence experienced by female welfare recipients is substantially higher than that suffered by women in the general population. Identifying the barriers that may emerge in each of these systems as well as the community supports available to battered women is critical to further understanding the impact of domestic violence on the formation of women’s career interests and choice goals.

Because battered women are isolated, they are exposed to a limited range of professional and educational opportunities and role models. Battered women’s exposure to different occupations is mostly through their experiences with social service and health care providers in domestic violence shelters and advocacy centers, counseling agencies, hospitals, urgent care clinics, and dental offices. As such, there is often a disproportionate representation of battered women’s career interests in social service and health care professions. A lack of knowledge about a wide range of educational and occupational opportunities may restrict women’s expressed interests to a small cluster of occupa-

tions or make it difficult for the women to identify any career interests or skills at all.

Contextual barriers and supports also help explain the discrepancies among women’s career interests, choice goals, and actions. Women are not only isolated from knowledge about different career options, but they are also isolated from experiencing activities related to career search, job education and training, and goal planning. For example, a woman may identify a career interest in the counseling profession. However, she may not be fully aware of or understand the different types of counselor positions available, the education and training requirements, and the financial resources needed to attain a counseling degree. Access to this information is no guarantee that she will act on it; women may eliminate career interests because they feel overwhelmed by the number of steps involved and the resources needed to realize their career aspirations.

The process of defining goals and identifying the steps required to accomplish those goals is also complicated by women’s experience of domestic violence. Battered women are often not afforded the safety and resources to plan for their futures, do not believe that doing so will make a difference, and must invest their energy in day-to-day survival. The nature of domestic violence robs battered women of a consistent sense of control over their life and body. These factors combine with the lack of career exposure and information; limited decision-making and goal-setting skills; and a lack of access to financial, child care, and transportation resources. Access to immediate financial resources is one of the most critical factors in a woman’s decision to pursue her career goals. Women may give up or set aside their career goals if pursuit does not provide immediate financial resources, or more important, if it requires financial resources that they do not have. Limited class offerings or inflexible job hours may deter women from pursuing specific career goals. Women surviving domestic violence may also need child care and transportation support to attend classes, keep appointments with academic and financial aid counselors, and go to job interviews. Many battered women are afraid to attend job interviews and appointments with counselors because they fear that they will panic, appear stupid, be required to answer personal questions, or explain job histories that are less than perfect due to their experiences with domestic violence. Many women do not even apply for certain job positions or academic programs because they are overwhelmed and intimidated by the application process, which includes completing forms and taking tests.

Domestic violence, by its very nature, is likely to have pervasive negative effects on battered women’s career self-efficacy and outcome expectations, to reduce the availability of supports, and to present a multifaceted set of barriers to battered women’s development of interests and the translation of interests into goals and accomplishments. Domestic violence shelters that attend to career development often provide information about resources and possible supports, and yet battered women often fail to use the resources that are identified. In the next section, we describe the use
of an empowerment model to support battered women in a manner consistent with SCCT. This model is provided in recognition of the complexity involved in assisting battered women not only to become aware of resources and opportunities but also to use those resources and, ultimately, to establish economic independence and a life free of abuse.

**EMPOWERMENT AND SCCT**

The career counseling needs of battered women vary across settings, over time, and with their individual experiences of domestic abuse, challenging counselors to accurately assess their needs and to balance immediate and short-term safety needs with longer term career and educational pursuits. Because economic resources are vitally important in allowing a woman to successfully leave an abusive domestic situation, the career development needs of battered women can and should be addressed in all settings to the greatest extent possible. Previous authors have described how SCCT might be applied to career counseling with a variety of populations (Lent & Brown, 1996). As we have described, battered women are faced with the particular challenge of the multifaceted deleterious effects of domestic violence. Accordingly, we now present E. H. McWhirter's (1991, 1994) empowerment model as an appropriate framework for applying SCCT to assist this special population. E. H. McWhirter (1994) defined empowerment as "the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless or marginalized (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without infringing on the rights of others, and (e) which coincides with actively supporting the empowerment of others in their community" (p. 12). Career counseling for the empowerment of battered women requires, then, that counselors facilitate critical reflection and awareness of the power dynamics at work in battered women's lives; facilitate the recognition, enhancement, and use of the skills and resources these women have; and, ultimately, facilitate the ability of these women to contribute to the empowerment of others. Recommendations for empowering battered women and for developing interventions that address the variables and relationships defined by SCCT are aligned with the five Cs of empowerment: collaboration, context, competence, critical consciousness, and community (E. H. McWhirter, 1997, 2001).

**Collaboration**

Collaboration refers to the dynamic relationship between the counselor and the battered woman, characterized by mutual definition of the problems and construction of goals as well as collaborative and flexible strategies for change. The fear, lack of trust, and self-doubt that often result from battering will require the counselor to attend closely to the counseling dynamic, supporting the woman's voice and encouraging her participation without pressure. Using a collaborative approach, the counselor takes an egalitarian stance without minimizing the expertise that she or he brings to the relationship. Collaboration is not inconsistent with providing specific information, stating overt values, or being directive; it means that differences in experiences, resources, perspectives, and so on, are used in the counseling relationship, rather than being denied. Signs of failure to establish a collaborative relationship may include a lack of client investment in the process, client silence, and confusion over goals and steps to achieve goals.

**Context**

It is essential that the battered woman's life situation, including her educational and career concerns, be understood in context. Important elements of that context include culture, family structure (e.g., children in the home), religious or spiritual beliefs, economic situation, quality and depth of support network, and characteristics of the surrounding community, including law enforcement sensitivity to domestic violence and the local opportunity structure relative to employment and education. A useful conceptual scheme for considering the battered woman's context is Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological model, with its attention to the various systems operating in people's lives. Discrepancies between self-efficacy and outcome expectations are unlikely to make sense without attention to contextual factors such as barriers and supports. Considering context also allows counselors to more effectively balance battered women's short-term needs with longer term career and educational planning. Although women in shelters often choose jobs that are immediately available regardless of interest, counselors may also begin to help women explore their career and education interests and possibilities, creating a longer term plan for pursuing those opportunities when they are safer, financially able, and ready.

**Competence**

Competence refers to recognizing the skills, resources, and experiences that women possess and that may contribute to achieving their counseling goals (E. H. McWhirter, 1997) as well as to developing new skills. Because of their learning experiences, battered women may have great difficulty identifying and believing the validity of their performance accomplishments. Homemakers in particular may need assistance in deconstructing and identifying the skills involved in conducting their daily activities in an oppressive context (Ibrahim & Herr, 1987). Given the deleterious effects of domestic violence on self-efficacy expectations, noninteractive skills assessment instruments that rely exclusively on self-report are inappropriate for battered women. Identification of client competence provides the client with a fuller picture of her performance attainments as well as encouragement (social persuasion), and both may increase her education and work-related self-efficacy expectations. Given that self-efficacy expectations predict the likelihood that an individual will attempt and persist in new behaviors, raising self-efficacy expectations for specific tasks can serve to increase the likelihood that a battered woman will attempt new behaviors that further her educational and career goals.
Because self-efficacy expectations are influenced by performance attainments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological responses (Bandura, 1986), career counselors working with battered women can (a) assist in identification of prior performance accomplishments; (b) construct sequential “experiments” that provide her with opportunities to experience success in relevant skill domains (e.g., teaching computer skills by allowing a woman to master basic skills first and progress to more advanced skills as her confidence increases) (c) increase opportunities for vicarious learning from models with whom the client can identify, including participation in support groups with other survivors of domestic violence; (d) increase her exposure to sources of positive feedback and encouragement (via the counselor, friends, support group members, and new sources of community); and (e) provide strategies for managing and reducing the physiological symptoms of anxiety, depression, and pain. Finally, counselors should bear in mind that competency does not necessarily translate into interests, and exploration of skills should not serve to restrict exploration of possible options.

Critical Consciousness
Latin American liberation scholars such as Freire (1971) and Martín-Baró (1994) have referred to critical consciousness as an individual’s ability to examine herself within her life context and her ability to critically analyze that context and to see herself as an actor in that context, rather than solely as an individual who is acted upon. E. H. McWhirter (1997, 2001) described critical consciousness as involving the dual processes of power analysis, or increasing battered women’s awareness of the dynamics of power operating in their lives, and critical self-reflection, which yields awareness of how they themselves influence, respond to, and can transform those dynamics. Understanding the dimensions of abuse and the influences of racism, heterosexism, sexism, and classism on her goals, opportunities, and perceptions of competence are all part of power analysis. Engaging in power analysis and critical self-reflection will clarify the barriers and supports present in the battered woman’s context, which may in turn decrease self-blame and attributions of inability (Swanson & Woitke, 1997). Critical consciousness lays the foundation for reassessing and “re-visioning” of present and future possibilities and facilitates the transformation from victim to survivor identity. Critical consciousness is also required on the part of the counselor (E. H. McWhirter, 1994). Left unexamined, the career counselor’s privileged status and power in the counseling relationship may serve to reinforce dependency and accommodation in the battered woman client.

Community
Battered women frequently experience profound isolation and may resist contact with others as a consequence of feeling ashamed, worthless, or hopeless. Facilitating the battered woman’s connection to community—through participation in a support group or a group defined by a common interest, activity, spiritual affiliation, or bond of kinship—can provide validation of roles and identity; physical, emotional, and social support; and opportunities for belonging and contribution. Meeting other battered women is often a profoundly powerful step toward moving from isolation to community and can greatly facilitate the growth of critical consciousness. With respect to social cognitive constructs, community can be a source of verbal encouragement and vicarious learning from other battered women who have overcome barriers or attempted similar challenges. A supportive community can be a place to get information, to try out new behaviors, and to increase the realism of outcome expectations. Facilitating women’s connections with role models and mentors in their career and academic environments and providing personal contacts on school campuses and job sites can foster development of self-advocacy skills and of social support networks that will provide women with more opportunities for performance attainments, vicarious learning, and especially positive verbal persuasion. As women pursue these opportunities, it is imperative that counselors prepare them for potential violence from the abuser, creating safety plans for home, work, and school. The most effective way to facilitate women’s connection with various communities is for counselors to cultivate a high degree of awareness of local community and work-related organizations, support groups, neighborhood action committees, and other channels of collective effort. Finally, valuing and using women’s natural support networks and communities in interventions may be an invaluable means for the counselor to facilitate their clients’ career development.

A final dimension of the empowerment model, and one that extends beyond attention to the SCCT constructs, has to do with action on the part of the counselor. Addressing the exosystemic and macrosystemic influences that perpetuate domestic violence and engaging individual and collective resources to challenge and transform the systems and structures that oppress represent another dimension of responsibility. (Note. The exosystem consists of the interconnections between one or more settings that do not directly involve the individual, such as public policy processes and decisions. The macrosystem is a society’s social blueprint, such as cultural values, gender roles, and race relations.) Counseling for empowerment requires that counselors develop awareness of social, political, and economic barriers to growth and autonomy experienced by battered women, not simply the intrapersonal or interpersonal factors that accompany domestic violence (E. H. McWhirter, 1994, 1997). Career counselors who work with battered women must be informed about domestic violence legislation, court proceedings, law enforcement systems, and national and state laws and policies that bear upon this serious problem and participate in efforts to strengthen communication between shelters and law enforcement agencies. Given that prevention is integrated into the goals that are common to the professions that provide career counseling, it is important that our knowledge of the economic, health,
and occupational outcomes associated with domestic violence (and other social ills) is represented in social action at national, community, and individual levels (Blustein, 2001; Fassinger, 2001; E. H. McWhirter, 2001). Career counseling must be practiced with individual battered women in their communities while simultaneously transforming communities to sustain the empowerment of battered women.

**DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH**

Two important directions for research include examination of the relationships between domestic violence (duration, severity, etc.) and SCCT constructs (career-related self-efficacy, perceived barriers and supports) and experimental evaluation of career interventions for battered women. Conducting vocational research with battered women is challenging for several reasons, however. First, there is little existing vocational research with this population to guide current efforts. Second, battered women are often unlikely to identify themselves as victims or survivors of domestic violence due to factors such as shame, denial or minimization, or fear of potential consequences to self or others if the domestic violence experience is acknowledged. Third, agencies that serve battered women are often reluctant to work with researchers because generally research is not part of the agency mission, staff have concerns that research participation will be a negative experience for clients, and/or cooperating with the research will constrain service delivery or take staff time away from client service. All of these reasons are well founded and consistent with difficulties common to community-based research (Flojo, 2001; Gragg, 2001; Hayashino, 2001; Torres, 2001). Fourth, there are few if any objective career instruments available for which there is evidence of reliability and validity for this population. Existing measures of SCCT constructs (e.g., E. H. McWhirter, Rasheed, & Crothers, 2000; Swanson & Tokar, 1991; Taylor & Betz, 1983) were designed for use with college students and/or have not been used with battered women. Finally, drawing from Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) terminology, the multifaceted causes and consequences of domestic violence will ultimately require researchers to integrate not simply *microsystemic* factors but also elements of the *mesosystem* (e.g., home/work interface), *exosystem* (local police policies and practices around domestic violence), and *macrosystem* (e.g., societal acceptance of domestic violence, gender role prescriptions associated with patriarch) into research designs. A reciprocal sharing of information among researchers in domestic violence and career development will help mental health professionals gain an even greater understanding of the role that domestic abuse plays in the vocational and economic development of battered women (Froud, 1999).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Domestic violence has multifaceted detrimental effects on the women who live this experience. In this article, we have illustrated how social cognitive career theory can be used to conceptualize the potential effects of domestic violence on women's vocational goals, choices, and achievements. Using an empowerment framework, we have provided suggestions for intervention that target SCCT constructs. Additional research is necessary to test the salience and utility of SCCT for battered women. Nonetheless, because of its attention to contextual influences and learning experiences, SCCT offers practitioners and researchers a very promising lens through which to understand and facilitate battered women’s development, their pursuit of academic and career interests and goals, and, in a very concrete way, their liberation from a devastating and deadly form of oppression.

**REFERENCES**


