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Contemporary Theories of Career Development: International Perspectives by Nancy Arthur and Mary McMahon, Abingdon, Routledge, 2018, 263 pp., £29.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781138279988

Nancy Arthur and Mary McMahon offer a well-written, comprehensive and accessible edited collection of chapters which explore some of the most influential and useful contemporary career development theories. The book has four stated goals: to provide an update of the theoretical developments and evidence base for the field; to offer a broader selection of theories than is usually seen in text books such as this; to offer a focus on international perspectives and the application of these theories in different cultural settings; and to offer a text that bridges theory and practice, providing practical help for practitioners who are keen to apply the theories in practice. It aims to be of value to students, researchers and practitioners, and I think it is.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part sets out the current challenges and debates within the discipline, situating the academic field within a context and conceptualising it as an applied field. In this section, the book editors themselves write a chapter which gives an historical account of the discipline, Watson highlights the value of a reciprocal relationship between research and practice, and Patton offers an excellent analysis of the key challenges facing the discipline (more of which later).

In the second part, the most substantial section of the book, the reader is introduced to 13 different approaches to career theory, written by leading researchers in the field. The theories chosen are wide ranging and include older theories, such as the Social Cognitive Career Theory, and newer ones such as The Psychology of Working Theory. Alongside these psychological theories, there is a chapter dedicated to sociological theories and one covering organisational approaches. A single chapter devoted to each of these substantial disciplines might seem like a fairly minimal acknowledgement of their contribution to the field but their inclusion is not typical in volumes of this sort, and it provides a fresh flavour to the book. Reflecting the international focus of the title, two of the chapters explicitly cover cross cultural theories (Arthur's CCCI and Arulmani's Cultural Preparedness Model).

Each of these theoretical chapters is well structured. A consistent format ensures that the authors describe the theory itself and the evidence which supports it, and provide an overview of the way the theory can be used in practice. A section on cultural considerations in each chapter reveals that the theories conceptualise culture in different ways, and highlights that the degree of cross cultural validation varies considerably from one theory to another. A case study designed to illustrate the ideas in tangible terms is offered helping to bring the theories to life and the text is broken up with boxes highlighting specific empirical studies, and reflective questions, which facilitate a greater understanding of the theories. The final part of the book comprises just one chapter written by the Arthur and McMahon themselves, which summarises the key themes of the book and offers positive directions for the future of the discipline.

This is all covered in less than 250 pages, so inevitably the authors have had to make their narratives succinct and have needed at times to gloss over some of the nuances. This presents a challenge with some of the more complex theories but in general the chapters are clear and accessible, and the authors offer the readers suggestions of where to find out more. One possible casualty of the brevity of the book is that the theoretical chapters are arguably a little light on criticism. The extent of the critiques offered does vary from one chapter to another, but in general the chapter authors focus on the positives of the theories they cover.

But so far so good. The book achieves its stated aims, offering an up to date guide to a wide range of contemporary career development theories, focusing on international perspectives and the application of theory to practice. The book is already on my recommended reading list for the students on my course, and I have no doubt that it will be one of the most well thumbed books in my own library before long. And yet, I am left feeling a little dissatisfied.

As it is an edited volume, readers might most often dip in and out of the book, reading a single chapter at a time. But reading the book cover to cover I was struck by how difficult it might be for a reader to grasp the differences between the theories and make sense of each one in comparison to the others. The theories have a lot in common. They all acknowledge the complexities of career decision making and career development; they all accept that both agency and structure have a significant part to play; and they all understand the uncertainty of the world in which these choices are made. In terms of practice, they all highlight the importance of the working alliance and practitioner reflection, and many emphasise the value of a narrative approach as a suitable way to apply their theory in practice. Differences between them, however, are harder to identify, and seem to be more about nuances of language and subtleties of focus. As a reader, I felt at times that I was reading one theory after another, each of which made perfect sense and offered a compelling account of career development, but I struggled to identify how the theories could be integrated with each other or how I should choose between them either for my own research or my practice.

Patton, in the first part of the book highlights what she calls the paradox in theories of career development. She points out that in our field there are many many different theories which stem from different academic disciplines and epistemological positions, and which focus on different aspects of career development. She argues that the siloed and disparate nature of the field is problematic, identifying three key problems: new theories are being developed at a great rate; the focus both in the literature and in practitioner training is on a narrow range of traditional theories; and attempts to integrate theories have not worked well. Yet this powerful and progressive argument is then followed by a series of chapters in which no effort is made towards integration. A number of the theories chosen are broad ones (for example, the social cognitive career theory and the systems theory framework), but the chapter authors do not go to great lengths to situate their particular approach within the broader landscape of theories, and the book gives the reader limited help with integrating the approaches either at a theoretical or practical level.

My criticisms are perhaps unfairly voiced within a book review; the problems raised are entrenched in our discipline as a whole. I enjoyed the book and it has deepened and broadened my understanding of the field; but alongside the high quality content contained in the book, I wonder if I can discern a missed opportunity. The brilliant opening section held the promise of a book on career theory which might take a new perspective, one which could offer some solution to the problems so well articulated in the early chapters. A fuller third section in which authors provide a theoretical synthesis, and a chapter in which the practical ideas introduced in the book are integrated could have gone some way to addressing the issues. But perhaps that is to be left for the authors' next project. Without doubt *Contemporary Theories of Career Development* is a sophisticated, thoughtful and valuable book, and one which I urge students, researchers and practitioners to invest in.

Julia Yates, PhD, CPsychol
Senior Lecturer, City, University of London
julia.yates.1@city.ac.uk