


Race and gender in the evolution of career decision-making: A psycho-anthropological review

**Author:**Indira Pillay¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Indira Pillay,
indirapillay25@gmail.com

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Background: On 12 July 2021, riots broke out in the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces of South Africa. Regardless of the various political theories, the issue surrounding these riots had the theme of inequality and poverty below the surface. The reality is that many people live in poverty, have no jobs and are desperate. It is, therefore, necessary for us to look at the issue of work and career development in a way that addresses the deepening poverty crisis in South Africa. Specifically, it may be helpful to consider how the evolution of career development led to the deep-seated inequality that we see today, with race and gender being key considerations.

Objectives: In this article, the author draws primarily from the existing literature to explore how evolutionary developments and globalisation influenced career decision-making and the roles that social forces and agents of power have played, especially in the context of race and gender.

Method: The author conducted a brief literature review. Issues relating to the social, political and systemic influences in the evolution of career development and decision-making were incorporated into this review, with special focus on race and gender.

Results: As the historic literature was analysed, the role of social factors such as race and gender on the evolutionary path of career development came to the fore. Colonisation, apartheid, race and gender discrimination were dominant.

Conclusion: Race and gender issues played significant roles in hindering career-development, with especially destructive consequences. As we proceed further into the 21st century, focus needs to be on advancing career-development initiatives for marginalised groups.

Keywords: career; career development; evolution; gender; race.

Introduction

On 12 July 2021, the lives of people in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces in South Africa were drastically disrupted for at least a week. Following the #freezuma protests, which began shortly after the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma, riots and civil unrest broke out across the two provinces under the guise of protesting the imprisonment of the former President because of his failure to testify at an anticorruption commission of enquiry (Ericsson, 2021). After the looting and destruction of several shopping malls and warehouses in these provinces, and as the dust settled, we are able to think critically about the events. Among these reflections must be concerns about poverty, unemployment and how the bleak career development prospects affected communities. People who were involved in the looting told journalists that they were looting because of a lack of income, the inability to find decent work, and one made it clear that she resorted to looting to get food for her child (Mlaba, 2021). Granted, not all the individuals who took part in the #freeZuma riots lived in poor communities, because news footage revealed a few people loading their stolen goods into luxury cars, such as the man loading stolen goods into a Mercedes-Benz Coupe (Sonjica, 2021). However, there is little doubt that factors such as poverty, unemployment, race and gender inequalities, other social ills, and coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) contributed to the civil unrest. It is important to note that little focus has been placed on the socio-political issues that influence career development within minority groups.

Research question

The author was interested in the evolution of career development and the major demographically related factors (such as race and gender) influencing career development over the centuries. These may possibly relate to the riots that affected KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in July 2021, given the

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underlying role that poverty and unemployment appear to have played. The author was also concerned about how marginalised communities in South Africa and similarly placed economies were affected. Because this is a vast area, the focus was mainly on race and gender. Where possible, connections were also made to similar communities in a global context.

Research methodology

To answer the research question, the author conducted a brief review of relevant literature, using the internet, Google Scholar and Google (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges', 2019). Databases were searched for information on the broad demographic factors influencing career development over history. All published and unpublished articles that aligned with the author's research question were located and read for relevance. The author was interested specifically in the effects race and gender have on career development. The author also took into account the socio-economic and political issues that influence race and gender have. The obtained data were critically examined and analysed in terms of their possible relevance and contribution to thematic areas. The emerging themes are presented below.

Race and career development

The July 2021 riots and earlier experiences showed the themes of unemployment and racism as contributory factors to poverty. If we consider race and employment, we see that Statistics South Africa (2021) cites the expanded unemployment rates as 48.7% for black African, 36.7% for Mixed race, 19.5% for Indian or Asian people, and 8.6% for white South Africans. This inequality has resulted from years of apartheid and colonialism. Racial discrimination severely affected the career opportunities of black people for hundreds of years. As colonialism by European settlers gained momentum globally, the marginalisation of African, Asian, Native American and South American people intensified. As a way of securing better jobs for the settler groups, the racist strategy of career demarcation and job reservation was born. It was described as one of the worst apartheid laws that hung over the heads of hundreds of thousands of South Africans of colour, and was a threat to their economic security (Hepple, 1963).

History reveals many examples of career demarcation and job reservation. For example, in the early 1930s, while in the eighth grade at school, the American political activist Malcom X was discouraged by his teacher from becoming a lawyer because of the colour of his skin (Duncan, 2005). The teacher, encouraged him to rather pursue a trade-like carpentry, in order to align with the sociopolitical reality of the society in which he lived, and especially the stereotyped role prescribed by the authorities. Later, Malcom X reported having heard the same teacher encourage white students to pursue any career field they wanted, regardless of the fact that many were not as intellectually endowed as Malcom X. Despite his academic ability, this destructive interaction and

the prevailing expectations dampened his dreams, and led to him dropping out of school. This is an understandable response, having been told categorically that there was no point in black children pursuing higher education (Biography.com Editors, 2014).

It is important to note that the North American and European countries that are considered to have more stable economies also have significant race issues. For example, studies conducted in France and Germany revealed little intervention with ethnic minorities with regard to assisting with career development and decision making (Al Ariss, Vassilopoulou, Özbilgin, & Game, 2013). South Africa witnessed the same type of experience suffered by African Americans and people elsewhere who were marginalised through colonisation and imperialism. Riots relating to poverty and economic opportunities, hinged on race, are well known in history, for example, the riots of the 1960s in the United States of America where the deeper causes were identified as poverty, unemployment, racism and related social factors (Emeka, 2021). The July 2021 riots in South Africa need to be viewed in a similar way, given the historical marginalisation suffered by black South Africans and the hardships endured to this day.

Both the colonial rule and apartheid stringently opposed the advancement of people of colour by systemic educational deprivations and job reservation. Pillay (2020) observed that psychologists actively participated in the process, promoting this ideology using biased 'psychological tests' to suggest that black people were unsuitable for professional, academic and intellectually-oriented careers. This strategy was used to keep black people in manual labour positions and exclude them from professional careers. Psychologist Martin Fick (1939) used flawed methodologies to suggest that 'intelligence tests' proved that black South Africans would not benefit from academic education and should be considered only for manual labour. This is one of many examples in history, of how so-called 'scientists' misused the scientific method to achieve their own aims and support the ideologies of an extremist government. Tucker (2007) observed that the most common way in which science has been used to further the policies of oppression and racial discrimination has been through claims that certain groups in the society are inherently deficient in some way, whether it is in terms of cognition, behaviour or some other characteristics. This type of rationale is then presented as 'evidence' representing a scientific approach, whereas it is not.

The American sociologist Du Bois (1939) observed a similar discrimination in the United States of America where African Americans were considered less capable of academic and professional education and careers. He noted that '[t]here was a time when the ability of Negro brains to do first-class work had to be proven by facts and figures ...' (p. 332), and that even though he was part of the movement to put forward the accomplishments of African Americans for the world to see, it was a 'disbelieving white world' (pp. 332-333). Clearly, the historical situation demonstrated that people of colour had their life scripts given to them and they had little say in it, including their career path.

The lack of choice in the occupational sphere among marginalised groups started centuries ago by the colonial and imperialist powers through slavery and similar labour practices (Pillay, 2020). We must also consider here the large groups of indentured labourers taken by the British and other colonisers, often under false pretenses, to labour in other parts of the colonised world, including South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, Malaysia, Ceylon, and Fiji. According to Anitha and Pearson (2013), these individuals, who were recruited from India, China and the Pacific, 'signed' a contract (usually using a thumb print because of illiteracy) that many did not understand, and were meant to receive wages, a piece of land, and some were promised a return passage home after the contract, but not all promises were kept. For example, Indians were taken under the guise of a better life to work as labourers on sugar plantations; however, their lives and living conditions were little more than that of slaves, with 14–16 h work-days, corporal punishment and restricted movement even after working hours (Persad, 2008).

In a variation of slavery and indenture, South Africa's Western Cape region saw the Dutch wine farmers, led by Jan Van Riebeeck over 350 years ago, giving alcohol to workers as part payment for their labour. This came to be known as the *dop system*, and was outlawed only after the fall of apartheid. Commenting on South Africa's alcohol abuse problem, Vice (2020) noted that the problem goes back centuries, to the Dutch settlers' treatment of slaves in the colony:

'The first cargo of slaves brought to the Cape – 174 souls stolen from Angola – arrived on the Dutch East India Company ship Amersvoort on 28 March 1658. Eleven days later, Jan van Riebeeck wrote in his journal of the pressing matter of the education of the newly acquired property. "To animate their lessons and to make them really hear the Christian prayers, each slave should be given a small glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco, etc. Within a few days these slaves will be brought under a proper sense of discipline and become decent people"' (online)

The *dop system* was a cunning attempt by employers to further systemic racism and domination. It was aimed mainly at workers identified as 'Coloured' who were resident in the Western Cape region and who were dependent on the wine farms for employment and an income. The destructive system worked in conjunction with colonial forces and apartheid policies, and served to strengthen the racist ideology characterizing people of colour inferior by encouraging substance abuse. In fact, the system was developed and implemented as a form of social control (London, 1999). It increased alcohol dependency, employer profits and was designed to keep the labourer a loyal servant who would come back for more. The employers, who were expert in alcohol production and its addictive properties, were obviously very aware of the effects the system would have on workers, their family lives and their communities. The *dop system* created a dependency that intensified the power dynamic that existed between the worker and the employer, especially within the existing racial power imbalance, resulting in workers feeling a sense of powerlessness (Falletisch, 2008). Even though the system has now been outlawed, the inter-generational effects of

this human-rights abuse are still evident over three centuries later. The impact on the region's communities is significant, with the incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder reported to be the highest in the world (May et al., 2019). In their efforts to produce some best wines in the world, employers deliberately exploited workers, damaged their health and family lives, and because the workers were people of colour, the prevailing governments allowed these abuses to continue. The extent to which the July 2021 riots in parts of South Africa was fueled by poverty-related desperation, inadequate food and health care, must be considered, as the country moves forward in its analysis of the unrest. Vhumbunu (2021) observed that while the cause of the riots included a combination of social, economic and political factors, the enabling conditions were the levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality that are rife in South Africa.

These are just some examples of how race influenced the world of work and career development, and constitute forms of systemic violence that impede the educational and career aspirations of marginalised groups (Epp & Watkinson, 1997). They show the kind of thinking that characterised colonial, imperialist and apartheid forces in creating and enforcing job reservation practices and suppressing the career aspirations of marginalised groups. Although career opportunities for people of colour have increased today, the structural inequalities in many parts of the world continue to hold people back. Weller (2019) noted that, in the United States of America for example, despite some improvements in educational and career opportunities, African Americans continue to struggle to get good, well-paying jobs. In South Africa, the legacy effects of educational disadvantages and a depressed job market mean unemployment and poverty for many. We must remember that South Africa is the most industrialised economy on the African continent, but it is now regarded as having the highest unemployment rate in the world among 82 countries monitored by business analysts (Naidoo, 2021).

In addition to racial prejudice, we find discrimination occurring on the basis of social class in many parts of the world. Often referred to as classism, it is 'the systematic oppression of subordinated class groups to advantage and strengthen the dominant class groups. It's the systematic assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on social class' (Class Action, 2021). In rural India, for example, the caste system, dictated the type of occupation that citizens were allowed to enter and the career paths to which they could realistically aspire (Anderson, 2011). The broader effect of such a discriminatory system is poverty and social deprivation that inevitably affects the lower classes. As a result, this becomes a vicious cycle with the lower classes remaining poor and this pattern continuing through the generations. Although rooted in a religious belief system that is over 2000 years old (Meharia, 2020), the practice is a serious violation of the rights of people to determine their future, and to live in a just and equal society.

Gender and career development

In the times of cave dwellers, work conditions appeared relatively straightforward, apparently designated by strengths,

weaknesses and gender. However, contrary to earlier notions that women were assigned work as gatherers (while men were hunters), based specifically on perceived physical strength, recent research suggested that women were also hunters (Elsesser, 2020). While women performed duties of caring for children and the elderly, gathering plants and fruit, they also performed some of the duties that men engaged in, namely hunting. Milks (2020) noted that this idea goes against the old 'Man-The-Hunter' model, which suggested that big-game hunting was primarily undertaken by men. Fairly recent discoveries have challenged those early ideas on gender and work. Researchers in the Peruvian Andes uncovered a burial site that would change the thinking about ancient hunter-gatherer communities. Hidden in one of the burial chambers of a woman, the archaeologists and anthropologists found tools used for hunting (Muzdakakis, 2021). This discovery changed the thinking about ancient gender roles and challenged the way we think about gender and specific jobs in history. Of course, the extent to which this finding applies to other ancient communities in the global context is not yet known. What is known, however, is that gender played a significant role in career opportunities, which is still evident today in most parts of the world, sometimes to great disadvantage to women.

Despite these findings that challenged our thinking about women and work in early history, the role of women as carer and nurturer in families has been a traditional one that dominated history. This is also related to the patriarchal system in which many societies evolved, with girls being more located within the 'feminine' service roles of caring and nurturing (Hadjar & Aeschlimann, 2015). For example, Yellen (2020) points out that historically many women had to leave work after getting married as a result of the sociocultural norms, as well as the types of jobs that were available to them. She noted that even today we must examine to what extent structural issues such as the challenge of combining family responsibilities and work may be hindering the progress of women in their career development.

At the turn of the 20th century changes in ideas around the traditional roles of women began to strengthen. Traditional gender roles such as being a homemaker and primarily being viewed as child rearers were beginning to be questioned by women (Herr, 2001). Since early in history, conversations gained momentum about moving into the workforce outside of the home and pursuing previously 'male only' careers, with protests for the equality of women and human rights taking place. Even the 'job' of fighting for human rights, was one that women took on eagerly and quickly. They did not leave this important 'job' solely in the hands of men, and also did not view their role as a purely domestic one. Even though in the early years women were kept out of leadership positions in the liberation struggle, they came forward as activists, and as their husbands and children were arrested or killed they took on leadership roles (Ardoin & Hartnett, 2020). One protest, in particular, in South Africa stands out, namely the 1956 Women's March in Pretoria. Thousands of women of all races and backgrounds protested against the pass laws that

affected black women, men and their families. Their protest, which shocked the apartheid government and its Prime Minister, who took cover elsewhere to avoid receiving the women's petition, reflected the determination of women to fight for human rights. Unlike the many protests seen through the years in South Africa, and the recent (July 2021) civil unrest, this protest took on a rather unusual form. Anti-apartheid activist, Lillian Ngoyi suggested that the group of women stand together in silence for a half an hour (South African History Online, 2011). This small act spoke wonders about the power that the women possessed and demonstrated the women's determination to fight for freedom and rights. It is protests like these by women that made significant strides for the upliftment of women and girls across the world, including the world of work and career development.

The brave stand taken by young girls for the right to education is another example of the state of the world with respect to women's education and we have seen that several celebrities have joined this fight (Rodriguez, 2018). Michelle Obama, and singers Meghan Trainor, Jennifer Hudson and others have added their voices to the call for girls' rights to education. We need to see this in the context of the way that girls' education and career aspirations have been given a back seat in many countries, including in Africa, Asia and elsewhere (UNICEF, 2021). In many countries, girls are prevented from receiving education and they are discouraged or not allowed to enter a career and the world of work outside of the home. In India and certain other countries, the birth of a girl is not necessarily a joyous occasion, because the girl child is seen as a financial burden for the family in terms of marriage traditions, the absence of work prospects to support the family, and hence, they are not prioritised for education. A report published in the *Lancet* has shown an increase in the selective abortion of girls after a first-born girl in India (Jha et al., 2011).

The world knows very well the story of Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan who, together with her friends, protested for the rights of girls to get an education. She was shot in the head and severely injured by an extremist group because of her activism for girls' rights to be educated and have a career (Malala Fund, 2021). The fight for the education of girls is a sad reality and a fight that should not be needed in 2021. However, it is still happening and UNICEF (2021) reports that about 129 million girls around the world are not in school. They also note that 49% of countries in the world have achieved gender parity in primary schooling with only 24% having gender parity in upper secondary schooling. This is a shocking statistic and contributes to the huge disparity in career development between men and women. According to Jang, Pak and Lee (2019), gender inequality shows itself early into a new career path as it serves to test all preconceived ideas of 'appropriate' career paths for men and women. Girls and women are often disadvantaged in the early stages of their education and career, where they face prejudice and stereotyping regarding what their role should be.

We are still quite a distance from creating an equal world for men and women, where women are not having to work twice

as hard as men to prove their capabilities or to access decent work opportunities. Yellen (2020) points to the absence of mentors, discrimination and unfavourable attitudes that hinder women's success in work contexts. In 2014, the National Gender Summit was held by the South African Commission for Gender Equality to look at some of the issues. Although celebrations were held to commemorate just how far the country has come since the fall of the apartheid government, prioritisation of the hurdles left to climb in attaining the gender equality is yet to take place (Aschman, 2014).

During the HIV epidemic, many girls ended up leaving school to take care of household chores and to look after younger siblings in what became known as 'child-headed households'. Pillay (2016) argued that children from child-headed households are faced with serious challenges, including being marginalised, socially disadvantaged and discriminated against with respect to their dignity and human rights, because they do not have parents or other adult caregivers. This experience has resulted in their education and career prospects diminishing, together with their hopes of moving out of poverty. In addressing the 'Make Poverty History' Campaign in London, Nelson Mandela (2005) said 'overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life' (webpage). In this context, we must consider the situation of girls having to leave school to be an injustice. This injustice occurs because women are traditionally viewed as nurturers, and results in society pushing them into this role, even when they are too young to assume the responsibility, while encouraging boys to continue their schooling. By girls having to leave school, they are deprived of a childhood and the related protections of childhood (Mkhatshwa, 2017). The automatic removal of the girl child from the school seems to suggest a belief that boys are not capable of performing caring, nurturing roles, that they should be prioritised for education and career development, and that girls' education and career aspirations can be sacrificed. All of these assumptions are flawed. Apart from having to leave school, the burden of having to provide food for the family falls more on the shoulders of girl children. Many spend their days trying to source food, and their education takes a back seat. This has been found in research in Africa, South Asia and elsewhere (International HIV/AIDS Alliance in India, 2006; Mkhatshwa, 2017). It is almost as if girls in these contexts have been transported back in time to the role of being the 'gatherers' again, while boys have been allowed to continue educational pursuits. It is one of the many examples of structural violence that hinders the education of girls, and significantly hampers their progress and career development (Osler, 2006). Covering the July 2021 riots enquiry, Shange (2022) discussed reports of the role of children in gathering food and other goods in the looting. Although this phenomenon is subject to various interpretations, it again reveals how poverty forces children into positions that are not consistent with their developmental level.

Women have been under-represented in various careers, which has been a concern globally, although in some spheres of work there has been attempts at addressing the problem

(Avolio, Chávez, & Vélchez-Román, 2020). A good example is in the healthcare fields such as medicine, psychology and others where these professions were historically dominated by men. Women had to fight quite a battle to level the playing field and get a foot in the door. As an example of the extent to which women fought to qualify and work as medical doctors, Dr Miranda Barry posed as a man using the name James Barry, and worked for many years as a medical doctor in Britain without her gender being discovered (Hurwitz & Richardson, 1989). It was the only way that she was able to get accepted into the profession. Even though women have been involved in healing roles, mainly informally throughout history, they were not formally allowed into the medical training programmes and, hence into the profession of medicine until the late 19th century (Jefferson, Bloor, & Maynard, 2015). These authors observed, however, that there has been a 'feminization' of the medical profession in recent years, with women now constituting the majority of medical students and general practitioners in the United Kingdom. This is similar to the South African finding of Pillay and Kramers-Olen (2014) who reported a substantial increase in the proportion of women trained in clinical psychology, from 50% to almost 80% over a 30-year period up to 2010. This is an interesting development in various ways. Firstly, it is a positive step in increasing the numbers of women in the profession. Secondly, however, it has 'feminised' the profession to the point where not many men are entering the field, and the broader impact of such a development is yet to be seen (Richter & Griesel, 1999). Thirdly, there is the risk of perpetuating the stereotype of women in the caring and helping roles.

The career aspirations of girls and women is an issue that needs attention, together with the broader opportunities that are available for women in the workplace (Hadjar & Aeschlimann, 2015). There is no doubt that more opportunities must be made available for women in the workplace, and that programmes of equal opportunity are promoted. These developments must work to strengthen the place of women in careers, without negatively impacting women's career status in the professions.

Conclusion

The way that career development and work opportunities have evolved over the years is interesting and also concerning, especially considering the extent to which they are entwined with critical demographics, such as race and gender. As the literature shows, although the world has come some way in addressing the issues of gender and race within the context of career development, there is still a very long way to go. Like with so many other aspects of life, race and gender are influencing factors in social, economic and work life. Systemic and structural barriers affect the education and career development opportunities for women, people of colour and marginalised groups. It is important that these issues be kept under the spotlight so that governments and society are constantly aware of the difficulties faced by certain groups in attaining education and the pursuit of decent work. It is also necessary that we are not blinded to the fact that countries

with economic stability also have serious issues surrounding race and gender in the career development context, and that global attention is needed.

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Author's contributions

I.P. is the sole author of this article.

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