



## How career construction counseling promotes reflection and reflexivity: Two case studies



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### ABSTRACT

This study examined which components of the process and content of counseling for career and self-construction fostered reflection and reflexivity in two clients. The study used the Interpersonal Process Recall procedure and client descriptions of important moments to investigate client reactions to counseling. The goal was to identify which components of the counseling content and process prompted client reflection about the past and present as well as reflexivity about the future. The most important content was the discussion of role models and early recollections. The most important process was revisiting past thoughts and actions, suggesting how past stories related to the present situation, and empathic responding to deep emotions.

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### 1. Introduction

Counseling for career construction aims to bring about change and forward movement in clients' lives. It entails much more than merely helping people make career choices. [Cardoso, Silva, Gonçalves, and Duarte \(2015\)](#) maintain that "career plans are one of the mechanisms by which individuals give order and intentionality to their existence" (p. 11). [Savickas \(2015\)](#) states that career counseling aims to help people construct careers, shape their identities, and design successful lives. This aim can best be achieved by enabling people to take responsibility for authoring their career-life stories: "Your life is a biography of choices. You have to construct your trajectory" ([Long, 2015](#), p. 3).

During the past few years, interest has increased in finding ways to determine not only how successful career counselors are in achieving the above aim but also the success of psychological interventions in general ([Niles, 2003](#); [Savickas, 2011a](#)). Blustein (D. L. Blustein, personal communication, February 10, 2016) also believes that researchers are consistently endeavoring to assess the effectiveness of psychological intervention including career counseling. [Ægisdóttir et al. \(2006\)](#), and [Tracey, Wampold, Lichtenberg, and Goodyear \(2014\)](#), too, declare the keen interest of career counselors in determining the success of the counseling process. Here, success is defined in terms of whether the clients benefitted from the career counseling intervention and also whether the intervention helped the career counselors better understand the clients' experience of the intervention.

The success or usefulness ([Savickas, 2011a](#)) of psychological intervention can be determined in various ways, including inviting clients to complete evaluation forms at the end of sessions and administering psychometric instruments to gauge the effect of the intervention. Researchers and practitioners are also showing increased interest in engaging with clients in a narrative manner to

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ascertain their experience of the counseling process, their emotions and thoughts during and after the intervention, and what were the most meaningful moments. Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) has proved itself useful in achieving these aims.

The present research contributes to understanding the effectiveness of career counseling by addressing the three questions central to the present Symposium about Research on the Process of Narrative Career Counseling:

- What changes during the intervention?
- What elements prompt these changes?
- How was reflexivity fostered and developed?

## 2. Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR)

IPR has been described as "a qualitative interview approach designed to access client and caregiver experiences as close to the moment of interaction as possible" (Larsen, Flesaker, & Stege, 2008, p. 19). Clarke (1997, p. 93) explains that the IPR idea originated when Kagan (1980), while watching supervisors re-examine videotape recordings, "[became] aware of and commented on a wealth of inner experience which they [the counselors] recalled on seeing the video" and realized that the counselors were able to probe more deeply into attitudes, emotions, and 'hidden' meanings embedded in original interactions on reviewing the interactions. Kagan and his colleagues (Clarke, 1997, p. 94) subsequently devised and refined "a sensitive and non-invasive method for prompting a person to help them retrieve many of the passing thoughts, hopes, fears, risks, images, feelings, decisions and perceptions that had run through their minds too fast to be dealt with at the time of the original interaction."

Analysis of what actually occurred during key moments in career counseling provides career counselors with important information on the impact and meaning of the intervention. Clients' understanding can be improved in many ways – IPR being one of them. In fact, the central aim of IPR is to enhance clients' insight into key moments during any kind of intervention (e.g. therapy, career counseling, and vocational guidance); moments that often pass unnoticed unless therapy sessions are carefully scrutinized.

Many researchers adapt IPR to suit their particular research needs, yet the following aspects of the technique are considered 'generic' (Clarke, 1997; Elliott, 1986; Kagan, 1975, 1980; Watson & Rennie, 1994). First, a counseling session is video-taped and viewed by counselor and client within 24–48 h of the initial recording. Second, clients remain in control of the situation and may choose when to stop or start the recording and how much time should be spent on reflecting on certain sections. Third, discussions should focus on what was happening 'then' (at the time of the recording) rather than on 'now' (while watching the recording). Fourth, prompts should be used to enhance the quality of clients' subjective experiences revealed during reflection. To facilitate deep understanding of what actually occurred during the intervention, segments of the video during which there are periods of silence lasting at least 3 s should be watched twice and reflected on.

## 3. Career and life construction theories

The intervention in the current research (conducting the Career Construction Interview (CCI)) was informed by career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2005, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) and life construction theory (LCT) (Guichard, 2005, 2013).

### 3.1. Career construction theory (CCT)

Career counselors who draw on CCT from a social constructionist perspective endeavor to help clients focus on central patterns of personal meaning (career-life themes), which can be identified by analyzing past memories, scrutinizing present experiences, conjecturing about future aspirations, and focusing on clients' deepest feelings and emotions. Career counselors and their clients thus work together to reconstruct and co-construct a life portrait that weaves together clients' multiple micro-narratives into a larger macro-narrative. In other words, the aim is to elicit clients' evolving career-life stories and to clarify the personal meaning that clients attach to these stories and, in doing so, to better understand clients' sense of self (Savickas, 2005, 2015). The life portrait is then used in autobiographical reasoning as the client considers how to cope with the career challenges and problem(s) they face.

### 3.2. Life construction theory (LCT)

Guichard's approach concentrates not on career construction but on life construction (Guichard, 2004; Guichard, 2009; Collin & Guichard, 2011). This approach's core concept is that of "dynamic system of identity forms". This expression refers to what is generally called "subjective identity", which is here considered as plural (=made of subjective identity forms), unified (=a system) and in evolution (=dynamic). "Subjective Identity form" (SIF) is defined as a composition of (1) a set of ways of being, acting, interacting and dialoguing in a certain setting; (2) certain visions of self, of others and of objects signifying in this setting; and (3) (more or less important) expectations about self in this setting. At a given time in a person's life, one (sometimes two) SIF(s) has/have a more important role in this person's system of SIF. Such a core SIF corresponds to a life domain in which this person wants to achieve something "as such". For many adults, their professional career is a core SIF. According to this approach, the dynamism of this system of SIFs originates both in the events that impinge on a person's life course and in the way this person makes sense of each of them. Two kinds of reflexivity combine in this meaning making. One of them is called ternary or trinity as it is a (inner or with someone) dialogue implying a circulation in mind between the three positions "I, you, and he/she. When this ternary reflexivity is about life construction issues, it allows the person to select some elements from his/her past,

current or expected SIF, to make connections between these elements and, in this way, endows him/her with a certain meaning that corresponds to a certain expectation about him-/herself in the future. Such an expectation is an important building block of an "expected SIF", from the perspective of which the dynamic system of SIF may then get reorganized: The person wants to achieve him/herself as such. This desire calls for the second kind of reflexivity: dual reflexivity. It is a mode of relating of the self (as a future subject) to the self (as a present object) from the perspective of a certain state of perfection or of a certain ideal (this expected SIF) that the person wants to achieve. These two kinds of reflexivity are at the very heart of the counseling interventions for life and career designing: they create an ideal situation, conducive to a setting up by clients of connections between some life events that make sense and are at the basis of a construction of future perspectives.

Guichard (2013) argues that people draw on six competencies in particular to manage career-life issues: a) the ability to be self-regulating in a given situation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), b) the ability to be self-efficacious (Bandura, 1997), c) the capacity to make systematic decisions quickly (Gati, 1986), d) the ability to identify and exploit opportunities (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), e) the ability to be (career) adaptable (Savickas, 1997, 2005), and f) the ability to incorporate and blend career-related actions into a coherent and intelligible career-life story.

### 3.3. Merging CCT and LCT

Both CCT and LCT are premised on the belief that a) people can construct personal meaning from their multiple career- and life-related encounters, b) examining these encounters or experiences can enhance their insight into and understanding of themselves, and c) the insight and understanding gained in this way can provide the foundation for career management and the elaboration of the self. Also, fostering clients' self-reflection on their stories and actions are integral features of both CCT and LCT. *Reflection* in this sense has a dual character: a) reflection on objective experiences (actual events), and b) reflection on the personal meaning subjectively associated with these events. *Reflexivity* occurs when people use their reflections to make important changes in their lives in the future. CCT (Savickas, 2005) and LCT (Guichard, 2009) hold that people can construct their careers and themselves by imposing personal meaning on their various actions in an attempt to become more adaptive. Savickas (2015) contends that workers' personal identities provide life themes that bind together their career and life stories.

## 4. Working assumptions and rationale of the study

The position of women globally has improved during the past few decades although not nearly enough has been done to facilitate true gender equality – neither in South Africa nor elsewhere in the world (Maree, 2013, 2014). Very few women (black women in particular who, from a human rights perspective and cultural perspective, can be described as a minority group) receive adequate career counseling and are helped to construct themselves satisfactorily. Despite progress in decreasing the educational gap, gender-based disparities still abound. For instance, the employment rate for men with degrees exceeds that for women, who also still earn less than men for the same work (OECD, 2015). The situation is worse in developing countries such as South Africa. Lekasi (2016) contends that African cultural beliefs (e.g. that women belong in the kitchen and the bedroom) make it difficult for women to advance to managerial positions and find a balance between fulfilling their responsibilities at home with their work-related responsibilities. This study represents a small contribution to the body of knowledge on this subject.

## 5. Aims of the study

This study investigated how career construction counseling promotes reflection and develops reflexivity. The researcher used the IPR procedure to determine what parts of the intervention, if any, prompted reflection and reflexivity. The goal of the study was to identify for further research how career construction counseling can be refined to increase client reflection and reflexivity.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1. Participants and context

The participants were selected purposively to take part in the two case studies. The first participant, Violet (a pseudonym), was a 42-year-old Tswana-speaking woman from an average socioeconomic environment who had requested career construction counseling (the selection criteria called for two women who had expressed a need for such counseling). Violet had a Bachelor's degree and was employed as the administrative coordinator of a large program at a local university. The mother of two children (girls aged 7 and 9), she felt frustrated in her current working environment and was keen to explore new occupational possibilities: *"How I can go about to help poor children? Students, for example those who come from areas where there is for example no electricity, who do not even know how to apply for bursaries and fields of study? I am not working with them now. Where do I start?"*

The second participant, Oprah, a 24-year-old Xhosa-speaking female student, held a four-year degree in Education and was enrolled for a Master's degree in Education. She occupied two part-time positions (as a teaching assistant and as a research associate) at a local university. Oprah came from an average socioeconomic environment, had two older siblings, was not involved in a relationship at the time of the study, and had sought *"some clarity on my future. With my personality, skills, opportunities, what would be the best fit for me?"*

## 6.2. Mode of inquiry

A naturalistic inquiry was carried out in the form of two explorative, descriptive, and instrumental case studies.

## 6.3. Data-gathering strategy

The Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) research method was used to gather qualitative data and to investigate what promoted reflexivity during the CCI. It was not intended to be a further intervention itself.

## 6.4. Intervention

The CCI comprises three distinctive sessions: the first session during which the participants' career-life stories are elicited; the second session during which life portraits are co-constructed; and the third session during which action is planned. Besides the opening question, "How can I be useful to you?", the CCI consists of five questions (Savickas, 2011a). Clients' answers to the first question reveal what they anticipate to gain from the career counseling. The first four career-life story questions (Whom did you admire or who were your three role models before you were six years old? What is your favorite a) magazine, b) TV program, and c) website? What is your favorite story – book or movie or book turned into movie? What are your three favorite mottoes or quotations?) shed light on clients' advice to themselves, and the last question (on their three earliest recollections) reveals their perspective on the challenges and problems they face.

## 6.5. Rigor of the study

Several strategies were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the study at all stages of the research, namely obtaining, preparing, organizing, and reporting on the data (Elo et al., 2014). For example, by videotaping all the sessions, an accurate account was obtained of the communication between the participants and me (the counselor). Also, colleagues and the participants themselves were requested to review and confirm my attempts at making meaning of the data; the participants' responses were reported verbatim (with only very light editing in order to preserve the authenticity of the responses) and as close to my own notes as possible; feedback was given to both the participants at all stages of the research; and they were asked to validate what I had written.

## 6.6. Data-gathering procedure

The CCI was conducted and videotaped in August 2015 (during two consecutive weeks; two days per week per participant). Because both participants lived some 50 km from the city where the assessments were conducted and could not afford being away from work for more than two days, it was agreed with each of them that the respective assessments (all three sessions) would be completed on one afternoon (three sessions with breaks in-between on the first day, which took roughly three and a half hours to complete in total). The participants agreed to return for the IPR procedure on the next day.

I began each participant's video session on Day 1 by asking them how counseling might be useful to them. I endeavored to establish what they expected from me and from themselves during the CCI. Next, I conducted the first 'episode' or session of the CCI, which took between 80 and 90 min (including a discussion of their responses based on Savickas' (2009) example). The second and third sessions comprised the co-writing of the life portraits and the planning of action steps.

The IPR procedure was carried out between 24 and 48 h after the three career counseling sessions had been completed. The IPR sessions each lasted about 90 min. At the end of each participant's IPR session on Day 2, I asked them to identify the three moments they considered the most significant during the first session of the CCI on the first day (Elliott, 1986). Rennie (2007) and Watson and Rennie (1994) describe these moments as moments when something 'shifts' for participants (e.g. when insight suddenly occurs or when they feel stuck). As recommended by Watson and Rennie (1994), I reviewed each of the three moments identified by the participants as the most significant a second time. They were then asked to recount their *recalled* (evoked) subjective experiences (their thoughts, feelings, emotions, and intentions) during these moments and explain why the moments were significant to them.

While describing the participants' progress, I reflected also on my own thinking as we (the participants and I) devised feasible future goals. As stated earlier, both of the participants found watching the video deeply moving and somewhat 'threatening'. I then adapted the IPR procedure slightly to accommodate both participants' idiosyncratic anxieties. I reviewed preselected segments of the video before watching them with the participants, during which there were extended periods of silence (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Elliott, 1986; Levitt, 2001; Levitt, Butler, & Hill, 2006; Watson & Rennie, 1994). I then introduced the recall session to the participants taking care to establish a non-threatening environment and emphasizing that we would reflect only on their and my thoughts and feelings during the selected parts of the session. The participants were asked to take on an observer role (Elliott, 1986). Once the videotape had started playing, either of us could stop it when we recalled particular internal experiences to ask a question or make a comment (Larsen et al., 2008). When the participants stopped the tape, I asked them to talk about their thoughts and experiences at that specific moment, noted their non-verbal behavior, and observed what was happening to see if there were inconsistencies between their verbal and non-verbal behavior.

I paid particular attention to the participants' tone of voice, expressions, pauses, and gestures (Kvale, 1996). They were asked to elaborate on their thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, describe any visual images that may have crossed their minds at

the time and give their views on how others saw them, and whether there were issues they would have liked to discuss with the other person (if the answer was yes, they were asked to recount what had precluded or inhibited open communication between them). Questions were phrased in the past tense, and we focused on process rather than on content; in other words, the interviews focused on the there-and-then of the communication we were investigating rather than on our experiences while observing the session on video. I nonetheless validated any experiences expressed by the participants before focusing on the there-and-then of those experiences. At the end of the IPR session, I asked the participants to rank the three moments in descending order of significance. I concluded the session by debriefing the participants and making sure they felt 'safe' and comfortable with what had happened. I asked concise questions and requested the participants to write down their views, thoughts, and feelings in a journal and make an appointment with me if they wanted to discuss anything further (Larsen et al., 2008).

### 6.7. Ethics

Written informed consent was obtained from both participants. The confidentiality of the data was guaranteed, and I also made sure they understood my comments during all stages of the CCI and IPR by allowing enough time for questions to be asked and answered.

## 7. Results

This section covers the responses to the question on important moments as well as the results of the IPR procedure for each participant.

As stated previously, after all three sessions had been completed, the participants were asked to identify the three moments they considered the most significant during the three sessions taken together. The aim was to get the participants to describe the moments when something 'shifted', insight occurred, or emotions intensified. In the case of both participants, the three moments they had identified as most significant correlated positively with three of the moments I had identified as significant. However, it should be stated that Violet – although she had not listed the question about the three role models as one of the three most significant moments – continually emphasized the central role her first role model (Nelson Mandela) had always played in her life (because of his sense of forgiveness and his commitment to promoting the education of children from disadvantaged communities in particular). Because the emotions of both participants ran high during their recall of their significant moments, a few short breaks were included during their respective sessions to help them come to terms with these emotions.

### 7.1. Most significant moments: Oprah

Oprah identified the discussion on the role models and on two early recollections (discussed below) as the most significant moments in the interview – moments when things 'shifted' for her. To save space, however, I report here only on the discussion on the role models and on the first early recollection.

#### 7.1.1. Extract from career counseling interview: role models

Counselor: "Whom did you admire or who were your role models when you were about six years old? Why?"

Oprah: "Steve Biko [anti-apartheid activist, assassinated at the age of 31, who founded The Black Consciousness Movement to mobilize the black population]. I identified mainly with his philosophy; his idea of black consciousness. His desire to be self-sufficient, his belief that one has to do things for oneself, think for oneself. His conviction that one should not expect things to be done for you. His philosophy [that one should not depend on others to think for you] has spoken to me."

Oprah stated that, like she herself, Biko was misunderstood and that people were quick to criticize him without understanding what he actually stood for. She added that telling me about him made her realize that she should believe in herself and not be put off by people who do not understand complex situations. Instead, she believed that one should always follow one's dreams, as Steve Biko had, and that that was her intention.

#### 7.1.2. Extract from career counseling interview: first early recollection

Counselor: "What are the first things you remember about your life? What are your earliest recollections?"

Oprah: "Some background first: My parents were always protective of me. I was always with them. Always. One day, I was five years old, they took me to school and dropped me off. They never prepared me for this event. I was fearful and sad. Scared. I felt left alone. Seeing so many new faces was overwhelming. It was also the first time I recall meeting people of other races. That for me was particularly scary. (SIGHS, KEEPS QUIET FOR A WHILE) I was too sad and disappointed in my parents to even move. I just sat in the corner the whole day long. Despite the teacher's efforts, I did not eat or speak. The moment my parents arrived to fetch me in the afternoon, I got up and ran out. I was very happy to get away from the crèche."

I asked Oprah which feelings or emotions she associated with the events in her three earliest recollections (Sweeney & Myers, 1986). She replied that she was surprised to see how the 'story' related to how she was feeling (e.g. lonely, fearful, scared, disappointed) at that point in time. She reported that these emotions returned while she was telling that 'story'. In response to my question: "The emotions of feeling alone returned, but something was different?", Oprah replied: "Yes, I am still feeling alone today. But I realized that I had based a conclusion on 'unscientific' evidence, namely that my parents had 'abandoned' me. I was actually not left alone."

"I realize that it is important to make sure that one has sufficient evidence before drawing conclusions."

## 7.2. Most significant moments: Violet

Violet identified the discussion on the three early recollections (discussed below) as the three most significant moments for her. I report here only on the discussion on the first two early recollections.

### 7.2.1. Extract from career counseling interview: first early recollection

Violet: "This happened in a little rural village in the Eastern Cape when I was about six years old, maybe a little younger. My father was the priest in the village and we (his children) were not allowed (SPEAKS LOUDER, GESTICULATES, SHAKES HEAD FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, OPENS PALMS OF HER HANDS), NEVER ALLOWED to fetch water from the well to clean stuff at our house or to help the women clean the stuff. Other children were allowed to accompany the women who fetched water but we were not. I was very keen to also fetch water, to also clean stuff. So, one day, I decided to find out what was happening for myself. Just after they had left, I carefully watched them and ran behind them. I followed them at a distance, hid behind bushes, and only joined them when they were taking water from the well. They were angry with me but I was so delighted to see the well. The water. I understood for the first time where the water came from. It felt very nice (HOLDS HANDS TOGETHER IN HER LAP). Even though I still had to watch others clean the stuff while I wanted to help them."

Violet stated that remembering how they (she and her siblings) were continually denied and prevented from learning new skills rekindled feelings of sadness and anger: "Many times I was not given the opportunity to learn, to grow because my father was the priest and because I was a woman. Because of financial constraints, my father refused to send us to (STOPS TALKING) boarding school where we could learn English like the other children. But I studied hard. Worked hard to learn how to speak English. I refused" [to be denied the opportunity to see the well and fetch water and to learn]. She confirmed that she had found ways to participate in activities that enabled her to face many other challenges.

In response to my question: "You now realize that refusing to be denied and doing what you knew was appropriate and important has helped you become resilient and able to face challenges. And that makes you proud of yourself?", she nodded her head and affirmed that she felt proud of herself because she could now help other young children: "Poor children, who are voiceless and have little support in life. Like Nelson Mandela and my father helped young children."

### 7.2.2. Extract from career counseling interview: second early recollection

Violet: "This story happened when I was in my first year at primary school. Now, in that school, we used cow dung to clean the classroom floors because cow dung does not smell bad, kills germs and repels insects. I had to sit in the classroom and wait for others to fetch the cow dung and clean the floors upon their return. I always wanted to accompany my classmates but I was not allowed to do so and that made me sad and frustrated me. So, on this day, I managed to get out of the classroom and followed the other children at a distance. After walking for a while, they reached a deep valley in that mountainous area, and had to jump over a small ravine to get to the cows and pick up the cow dung. I then ran towards them and tried to jump over the ravine but in my hurry to get to them I fell down the ravine and hit my forehead against a stone. I was hurt badly. They eventually took me to hospital. I don't know how long I stayed in hospital...for a long, long time. (LOOKS TO HER RIGHT, TEARS WELL UP IN HER EYES; SHE REMAINS SILENT FOR A FEW SECONDS) The teachers were punished because of their inability to stop me and that made me feel so bad. After that, I accompanied the other children to the well whenever I could avoid being seen by my teachers. In the afternoon, when they cleaned the classroom floor with the cow dung, I waited until teacher had left the classroom and then helped the others clean the floor." (SIGHS HEAVILY)

Violet recounted how miserable she felt about how harshly the teachers were punished. The fact that women and children were not allowed to voice an opinion, to talk back; the fact that the teachers were not allowed to explain what had happened, made her feel 'sad and angry.' She thought about the fact that, notwithstanding these memories, she was not deterred from "learning new things, doing things, experiencing". She concluded: "Currently, I am unvoiced again. Not allowed to voice my opinion." Cognitively, she was thus able to make a connection between that central theme in her early recollection and her current situation.

### 7.3. Results from IPR sessions

The IPR sessions directly addressed the three questions raised by this symposium about Research on the Process of Narrative Career Counseling. What changes during the intervention? What elements prompt these changes? How was reflexivity fostered and developed?

#### 7.3.1. What prompted change?

During the IPR sessions, the clients indicated that reflection was prompted by revisiting past thoughts and actions. From their perspective, the counselor's compassionate encouragement to think about these things clarified the personal meaning they attached to events in their lives, enhanced their self-understanding, improved their sense of self, and prompted reflexivity concerning forward movement. As anticipated, reflection and reflexivity prompted change. The IPR interview elicited the clients' thoughts about these processes.

**7.3.1.1. Reflection about the past.** Oprah reported that "*The more I recall and think about these things, the more I begin to understand myself.*" Violet indicated that reflections on past events, thoughts, and emotions prompted reflection. The clients indicated that counseling helped them to connect the dots in their lives. Oprah said, "*The conversations help me connect 'missing blocks' [and understand myself better].*" Oprah drew on her reflections to clarify why she had requested career counseling: "*By referring to my life themes, considering matters has helped me understand which careers might suit me.*"

Violet connected the dots into a life theme. She explained that her dream and plan was to help voiceless, unvoiced, and poverty-stricken children in disadvantaged regions. Counseling helped her to "*remember how often I was silenced. Even when my father died I was not allowed to cry. I want to fight the unfair treatment of women, like the teachers who were shouted at in my school because they could not take care of all the children at all times. I want to help people express themselves.*"

**7.3.1.2. Reflexivity about the future.** The clients indicated that counseling had prompt new thoughts about the future. This reflexivity enabled Oprah to discover a new understanding and awareness of her situation as well as her desire to plan her future (more) satisfactorily. Oprah believed the sessions had changed her views about her future plans: "*The interview has cleared up my confusion. I now know what I will do.*" Oprah expressed a new found intention to base her career decisions on facts: "*I will base my career-related decisions on facts. Not basing one's decisions on scientific facts is misleading.*"

### 7.4. What changed

In response to the question of what changed during counseling, both clients indicated an enhanced sense of self and increased empowerment to be self-authors of their career stories.

#### 7.4.1. Enhanced sense of self

Oprah showed her awareness of who she was and indicated that her ability to care about herself and others had improved: "*I am surer of who I really am and want to be and that gives me the courage to look after myself and help others.*" Oprah felt more self-assured after the sessions: "*I should not be afraid of what others say but trust and believe in myself.*"

Violet found confirmation of who she really was and wanted to be: "*You can if you believe you can and know who you are and not allow others who do not know you to tell you who you are. My real work is to make an impact on young, poor, destitute children who are denied [opportunities].*" Violet reported that what she had previously perceived as disruptive events had actually helped her become more adaptable: "*Moving around so often also helped me become stronger.*" Her pride in who she was emerged clearly: "*You need to always listen to your heart and not allow yourself to be unvoiced. I am proud of what I have achieved and of who I am.*"

#### 7.4.2. Self-authoring

This theme concerns Oprah's new insight and her experience of having become more self-determining: "*I found the 'advice' I sought in my responses to your questions.*" Oprah felt freer to follow her own convictions: "*I realize that I should be true to myself; listen to my heart.*" Oprah's central aim emerged during the IPR interviews, namely her desire to "*stand up for the rights of women*".

Violet gave evidence of a new-found ability to use her reflexivity to draw on her career-life stories and use them to deal with change in her life in the future. Violet talked of self-authoring in how she was planning to change her career journey in a way that would help her realize her own (and others') potential. Violet's overwhelming desire was rekindled. She yearned to "*help poor children who live in dire circumstances in shacks with nothing to achieve their potential*". Violet reported that the sessions had helped her identify her 'destiny'. She realized that "*the admin job I am doing now is not what I was destined to do.*"

#### 7.4.3. Emotions

Both clients reported changes in self-awareness and self-authoring prompted by reflection about the past and present as well as reflexivity about the future. There was one topic that both changed and prompted change. Both clients spoke of the role emotions played during counseling. Examining deeply felt emotions prompted change. During counseling these emotions would crest and resolve in changes in thoughts and feelings. In addition to prompting change, emotions themselves changed, especially near the end of counseling. The negative feeling associated with presenting problems moved toward optimism and courage as the clients felt excited about new possibilities.

## 8. Discussion

This study used the IPR procedure to examine how participation in career construction counseling fostered reflection and developed reflexivity in two women who had sought career counseling. The present study confirms the findings of Clarke (1997) and Kagan (1980) that IPR can successfully promote people's self-reflection and reflexivity because of its ability to shed light on the deeper meaning of exchanges during counseling sessions. It can facilitate profound awareness and articulation of people's internalized experiences that typically go unnoticed and undealt with during counseling. The two case studies reveal the ability of IPR career counselors to uncover and probe clients' subjective experiences (feelings, emotions, and points of view) as well as their objective experiences (thoughts, ideas, judgements, beliefs, and opinions).

The first participant (Violet) identified the discussion on role models as the most important moment (during which a shift occurred, insight ensued, or emotions intensified), followed by the discussion on two early recollections. The second participant (Oprah) identified the three early recollections as the most important moments. However, she, too, emphasized the importance of her role models in her career-life. In the study, the IPR procedure thus confirmed Barclay's (2015) view that the exploration of participants' role models and elicitation of their early recollections in particular promotes their self-reflection and reflexivity. As in Barclay's (2015) study, both of the participants in the present study acquired a good understanding of the roles their significant others continued to play in their lives, irrespective of whether they still formed a part of their current lives. The IPR sessions also corroborated Del Corso's (2015) finding that career counselors can facilitate clients' self- and career construction by focusing on their deepest emotions: "Career counselors can help individuals adapt by attending to [their] emotions" (p. 201). The IPR procedure confirms that meaning-making lies at the heart of narrative career counseling (Cochran, 1997).

The IPR procedure revealed that, from the perspective of the participants, reflection was prompted by revisiting past thoughts and actions. Encouraging them in a compassionate manner to think about these things clarified the personal meaning they attached to events in their lives, enhanced their self-understanding, improved their sense of self, and inspired forward movement. The counselor suggesting how their past stories related directly to their current situation and feelings also prompted reflection. Likewise, displaying an authentic desire to be useful to the participants created a relaxed atmosphere conducive to self-discovery and prompted meaning-making and the advancement of the participants' career-life stories.

The present research also confirms Timulák and Lietaer's (2001) finding that IPR enhances career counselors' therapeutic skills regarding the use of metacommunication between clients and career counselors, helping career counselors become more aware of clients' 'compliance tendency' and helping 'unvoiced' people articulate their deepest feelings. A not-knowing, situation-driven position (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Gehart, 2007) should be welcomed as it promotes 'collaborative counseling', that is, working together to promote the aims of counseling.

## Notes

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