CONSTRUCTIVIST CAREER COUNSELING:
MODELS AND METHODS

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As U.S. society approaches the turn of the millennium, it seems to be moving from a twentieth century objectivist perspective on facts to a twenty-first century constructivist perspective on meaning. Constructivism represents a metatheory and epistemologic stance that emphasizes self-conceiving, self-organizing, and proactive features of human knowing (R. Neimeyer, 1995). The scientific community's growing interest in the social construction of reality, with its multiplicity of perspectives, holds many implications for theories of career development and counseling. In recent years, researchers have produced an embryonic literature that uses constructivism to comprehend careers. To date, this discourse has not been brought together in a single source. Thus, the present chapter seeks to comprehensively review significant applications of constructivist metatheory to vocational behavior.

This review consists of four sections. The first section describes how movement from an industrial to an information society has altered occupations and forced re-examination of careers. It describes how constructivism's focus

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on self-conceiving, self-organizing processes is reshaping career counseling from an objective enterprise to an interpretive science. The next three sections describe innovative applications of constructivist metatheory to careers in the form of personal construct psychology, biographical hermeneutics, and the narrative paradigm. Each section has three parts, the first part explains a theoretical model of career, the second part describes that model's methods for career assessment and counseling, and the third part provides specific examples of how practitioners apply these methods.

FROM OCCUPATIONAL OBJECTIVITY TO WORK PERSPECTIVITY

Throughout most of U.S. history, individuals typically inherited their occupations from their parents. For example, people born on farms became farmers and children of lawyers became lawyers. With the advent of industrial society at the end of the nineteenth century, work changed. Large industries became the center of cities and people moved to these cities to secure employment. Rather than working for themselves or a small business, more and more people worked for large, bureaucratic organizations. These organizations gave birth to the concept of career as individuals' worklives followed a predictable course up an organization's ladder. Career path replaced vocation, or calling from God, as the dominant metaphor.

Society no longer encouraged people to select a life work by following family traditions or praying for spiritual inspiration. Individuals now had to choose an occupation from the hundreds of specialized and compartmentalized jobs engendered by industrialization and its assembly lines. One specialized occupation that emerged was vocational guidance. Guidance applies the viewpoint of positivist science and its technical procedures to help individuals rationally choose occupations. Frank Parsons (1909) devised the paradigm for modern vocational guidance in urging counselors to objectify a client's abilities and interests and then use "true reasoning" to match these traits to occupations with corresponding requirements and rewards. Parson's paradigm for guiding occupational choice remains to this day the most widely used approach to career counseling. Today individuals describe themselves in responding to inventories and tests, and a computer compares these responses to occupational profiles in its data banks. The computer produces a profile that portrays objectively the degree of fit between an individual and dozens of occupations. After discussing these empirical findings and objective facts with a counselor, clients select a few occupations for in-depth exploration, leading to a final choice. Parson's "true reasoning" paradigm provides career practitioners with a rational and objective model along with scientifically reliable and valid methods for helping individuals choose occupations in a society where

occupations have become overly specialized. This paradigm has served twentieth century organizations and individuals well.

However, the end of the twentieth century finds society changing its base from industry to information. Huge corporations such as IBM, U.S. Steel, and General Motors are disappearing. Without the hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations that gave form to careers, career paths themselves seem to be disappearing. Former U.S. Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich observed that "Twenty years ago, you could fairly easily plot a career. It might have had a few twists and turns, but you would progress though a hierarchy of positions that were more or less predetermined. Career paths are now gone. They're not even trails...The lack of a career path means that people...are more on their own" (Brazaitis, 1996). Daily newspapers are replete with stories of "re-engineering organizations," "downsizing," "learning organizations," "dejobbing," and "contingent workers." Fewer and fewer companies promise lifetime employment following a career path. As the information age sweeps away the old hierarchies, its computer technology flattens organizations, breaks middle management rungs off the career ladder, and hires "contingent workers" for term-specific contracts. Job security is history. Today's workers must manage their own careers, with resumes becoming a list of transferable skills and adaptive strengths. Increasingly, individuals working at overspecialized jobs that involve a single task are being replaced by employees who work in teams with each member performing many tasks. Given this transformation in society and its occupations, lifetime employment must become lifetime employability. Individuals can anticipate losing several jobs during their worklives, and thus should focus on skills that can get the next job.

This change in the structure of work and its social organization means that the modern paradigm of matching people to positions needs to be expanded to address individuals as managers of their own careers, drawing meaning from the role of work in their lives not from an organizational culture. Careers must become more personal and self-directed to flourish in the postmodern, information age. The need to shift to personal meaning and become an agent in one's own life draws inspiration and support from constructivist metatheory (Savickas, 1995a). The lens of constructivism allows counselors to view career, not as lifetime employment on an organizational ladder, but as a carrier of personal meaning that defines and structures significant events in a life (Carlsen, 1988, p. 186). In the postmodern era, career may become a framework for personal meaning, rather than a path through an organization.

Career counselors who make note of these transformations in society and its occupations are using constructivist models and methods to reshape career theory and practice. Constructivism extends objectivism's focus on predicting who will fit which occupations to include the meaning of work to individuals and how they can use this meaning to manage their careers and complete their lives. Rather than looking just at how people fit into the occupational structure,

constructivists envision how work fits into peoples' lives (Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1993, 1994). Personal construct psychology offers one constructivist psychology that makes career counseling more useful to clients and more interesting to practitioners.

PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY

Career counselors and researchers have effectively mined the deep insights provided by George Kelly (1955) in his monumental *Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Kelly himself launched this program of reflection and research when he wrote that vocation is "one of the principal means by which one's life role is given clarity and meaning" (p. 751). Personal construct counselors make meaning of vocational behavior and comprehend careers by examining the personal constructs that agents use to channel their anticipations for and interpretations of the role that work plays in their lives.

Personal Construct Model of Careers

Personal constructs, of course, are dimensions of appraisal that individuals use to make sense of themselves and their situations. A construct consists of a pair of alternatives from which to choose. Individuals cannot make choices outside of the alternatives for affirming and denying which they themselves have constructed. As dimensions of contrasts, personal constructs function like psychological longitude and latitude to locate and orient the self in social space. Constructs thus provide a personal orientation toward events that individuals encounter as they move through life. Individuals actively use constructs to order their lives, make meaning, and shape action. When individuals encounter an event or need to make a choice, they invoke their constructs to determine what is at stake and to identify alternative responses.

To elicit constructs, counselors ask clients to think of three people, say schoolmates, and then explain how two are similar yet different from the third. When a client answers, for example, two people are hard working, the counselor asks for the opposite of hard working. The client might answer playful. In this example, one of the client's personal constructs is "hard working versus playful." When appraising other people and the self, that client may consider them to be either one of these two poles. When thinking of occupations, the client may evaluate an attractive occupation as involving hard work and an unattractive one as requiring playful behavior.

Occupational Interests

Constructs are personal pre-occupations that clients may turn into social occupations. The individual's constructs can be viewed as values, that is,

dimensions of judgment and evaluation. Constructs channel individuals' movement along action pathways they themselves have erected. Viewing the world-of-work through their constructs allows individuals to recognize opportunities and possibilities that are useful and meaningful to them. When they link personal constructs to occupational roles that can implement them, the individual becomes interested. In this manner, constructs interact with the social context to produce occupational interests. Thus interests denote the subjective recognition of opportunities to enact constructs and implement one's self-concept, thereby affirming values and manifesting identity.

Interests, unlike constructs and values, are not inside the person. Instead, interests represent potential connections between individuals and their social situations. For example, consider a professor who is preoccupied with the following constructs: hard work versus play, asocial versus sociable, altruistic versus egocentric, and rule-oriented versus artistic. Using this outlook, he is on the look out for occupations that require reflection and action along these dimensions. He evaluates the position of college professor as an interesting occupation because it offers numerous action pathways that suit his way of moving in the world. At different times during the same day, the professor can move as a hard working-asocial researcher; a playful-sociable-artistic teacher; a rule oriented-altruistic-sociable academic advisor; a rule oriented-egocentric-hard working administrator; and a sociable-altruistic member of college committees. When presented with new opportunities, the professor can make effective decisions by patterning his constructs. For example, if invited to be a journal editor, the professor could recognize the opportunity to work hard and alone at applying the rules for reviewing and editing manuscripts to help colleagues publish their ideas. His preoccupation with hard work, solitary activities, altruism, and rules steer him to recognize editing a journal as an interesting task that could implement his self-concept and contribute to his profession.

Vocational Themes

A meaningful feature of constructs is their co-relation. Cochran (1977) explained how tightening co-relations among two or more constructs produces themes, which increase intensity and complexity in making meaning. For example, if the constructs of hard work, altruism, asocial, and rule-oriented systematically co-vary when making judgments, then this pattern forms a theme. In the example, the professor implements his theme in choosing his occupation and manifests it in his work activities. Themes, and the intensity they provide, can be quite useful in framing career choices (Cochran, 1983) because they constitute a focus for vocational identity and value commitments. Of course themes must be harmonious, or internally consistent, to provide individuals with a clear vision of who they are and what they want. Inconsistent

themes prompt conflict (Cochran, 1977). Conflict involves approaching a choice with two constructs that oppose each other. As integration of clashing constructs increases, so does the intensity of the internal conflict. For example, consider an individual with constructs of altruism and money. If harmonious within the system, then more altruism means more money such as when a person believes that being selfless leads to selfish rewards. If negatively correlated, then conflict occurs as the individual construes more altruistic jobs as paying less money. Cochran and Giza (1986) identified common construct conflicts for males as "salary versus freedom," "salary versus time," and "freedom versus security." Females more commonly reported conflicts of "challenge versus time," "challenge versus security," and "ability utilization versus security." These conflicts must be resolved through compromise to allow an integrative choice to emerge. Lack of compromise or synthesis can produce a career pattern in which the individual moves repeatedly between jobs in social service and in sales—oscillating between positions that offer altruism or economic return. An integrative choice changes "either/or" to "both/and." In this illustration, a job that provides both altruism and a good salary might be executive director of a large social service agency.

Vocational Construct Systems

A group of personal constructs, and themes, that coalesce as highly pertinent to a life role form a system. With regard to work and occupations, Kelly (1955) coined the phrase "vocational construct system" to denote this matrix of meaning. The vocational system is a subsuming construct system created by self-conscious awareness and deliberation concerning the work role. The vocational system provides orientation, control, purpose, and evaluation of vocational behavior as a means of enhancing the realization of one's identity through work. The vocational system can be thought of as a structured awareness and network of action pathways. The more independent constructs used to make meaning of the work role, the greater the psychological depth and significance of the vocational behavior and choices.

Vocational construct systems develop along the line of expanding comprehensiveness of description, anticipation, and control. As a system develops, the meaning of vocational behavior becomes clearer, inner resources are made available, possibilities are anticipated, and alternatives are selectively made manifest. Discontinuities or life transitions prompt individuals to elaborate their vocational systems. Individuals make meaning when they encounter a turning point or interruption in movement that requires a choice to steer future behavior. Development of vocational systems follows a predictable morphogenesis, or sequence of structural changes in the relationships among the constructs in the system. This hierarchical restructuring occurs through differentiation and integration.

Differentiation. Differentiation refers to the number and diversity of constructs. Increasing differentiation deepens understanding by allowing finer discriminations and more complex, multidimensional perspectives on work. Complexity of the vocational system initially increases its functional effectiveness. However, eventually the constructs become too numerous to function effectively unless they are organized. Without organization, excessive differentiation can lead the construer to be "lost in thought" or "idea rich, and action poor." In the career realm, excessive differentiation of a vocational construct system produces indecision. To resolve doubt requires re-organization of the system to integrate the perceived alternatives and ease decision making.

Integration. Structural integration organizes the system by inter-relating the constructs and making them depend upon each other, such as in the themes described by Cochran (1977). Descriptively, this means that for two integrated constructs, change in one requires change in the other. Integration means reformulation of existing constructs, not accumulating new information. Newly differentiated superordinate constructs integrate the previous system thus resulting in a complete reformulation of the preceding knowledge structure. Each modification engenders a refashioning of the ensemble which stabilizes in the best possible form. Just as too much differentiation without integration leads to problems, so does too much integration without further differentiation. Excessive integration promotes rigidity because the resulting tight network of inter-related constructs makes it difficult to change a single idea because numerous other constructs would also have to change. In the extreme, tightly integrated constructs become almost impenetrable by new constructs, leaving little room for new discoveries. Hierarchical restructuralization is best served by a balance between differentiation that produces increasingly diverse construals of the world-of-work *and* integration that organizes these diverse constructs into a coherent system that can effectively guide vocational behavior.

Development Stages in Vocational Construct Systems

Development of vocational construct systems through dialectic processes of differentiation and integration constitutes a continual process. Nevertheless, Neimeyer and his collaborators have produced a heuristic model of vocational development that uses structural characteristics to signify stages of development. The four stages, or mileposts, in the model progress toward more effectiveness.

The first stage reflects low diversity with low integration. Individuals who make sense of the work role using this type of vocational construct system possess relatively few dimensions for comprehending occupations, and the dimensions they do use are weakly organized. At this stage, individuals lack

work values and understanding of the world-of-work. Without an overview and coherent structure, they find themselves unprepared to make realistic choices. Eventually, they must broadly explore occupations to increase discrimination concerning the work role and expand their fund of occupational information.

The second stage in the morphogenesis of a vocational system integrates existing constructs into a coherent and clear organization. If the organization is too tight, then it can produce a tunnel vision and narrow exploration. The most familiar example of tunnel vision is demonstrated by individuals who foreclose on parental values to integrate their systems. In contrast, a loosely organized system enhances personal decision making about preferences and provides a focus for in-depth exploration of a suitable and viable group of occupations (Neimeyer, Nevill, Probert, & Fukuyama, 1985; Nevill, Neimeyer, Probert, & Fukuyama, 1986).

In due course, this exploration-in-depth produces new constructs and increases differentiation. This stage-three structure gives a sensitivity to and discrimination between occupations that most people would confuse, such as counselor versus social worker or clinical psychologists versus counseling psychologist. This precision increases anxiety and indecision if individuals do not eventually organize it. Accordingly, re-integration at stage four produces a new organization with a variety of systematically inter-related constructs for judging occupations. This highly differentiated yet tightly integrated system allows an individual to make effective career decisions, specify occupational choices, and articulate a vocational identity.

Vocational development tasks. The developmental progression of the structural stages described by Neimeyer (1988) may explain the processes that underlie stages of career development (Super, 1957). The underdeveloped first vocational schema characterizes the growth stage in a career, with its occupational fantasies and unrealistic self-concepts. The second-stage vocational system, with its organization of a limited range of diverse constructs, characterizes the crystallization period during which individuals formulate preferences for occupational fields. The stage-three structure, with its increased precision, corresponds to the specification period during which individual choose a particular occupation. The fourth structure fits with the implementation period during which individuals prepare for and then begin to participate in the chosen occupation.

Indecision versus indecisiveness. The vocational stages outlined by Neimeyer (1988) may also provide the key to finally allow researchers to empirically compare career indecision to career indecisiveness. Practitioners readily recognize differences between indecisive clients who cannot make any choices and undecided clients who can generally make untroubled choices yet

are undecided about a career choice. In contrast, researchers have repeatedly failed in their attempts to linguistically explicate and operationally define differences between indecisiveness and undecidedness. From the perspective of Neimeyer's stage model, indecisiveness seems to correspond to low differentiation in stage one whereas indecision seems to correspond to excessive discriminations in stage three. Empirical research to investigate this hypothesis may prove fruitful where other attempts have failed.

Personal Construct Methods for Career Counseling

Career intervention begins with assessment of a client's vocational construct system, usually with some version of Kelly's (1955) Role Construct Repertoire Test. The Rep Test, as it is commonly called, elicits constructs by having clients systematically compare and contrast significant people in their lives. Career specialists have adapted the Rep Test to elicit vocational constructs by having clients construe occupational titles.

Although construct systems elicited with occupational titles certainly have useful applications in counseling and research, their general use would reinforce the false dichotomy between personal and career counseling. Kelly (1955, p. 821) cautioned against separating these two domains when he wrote that a "client who loves to pound nails, dig holes, or grease machinery is likely to be using constructs which govern his relations with people as well as his relations with things." After reviewing the pertinent research, Neimeyer (1992) concluded that construct systems elicited by construing people associates more strongly with career development than do construct systems elicited by construing occupational titles. Thus, it may be more fruitful to base career assessment with Rep Grids on significant people rather than occupations. This personal approach to assessment of vocational constructs resolves a current discussion among career counselors regarding how personal is career counseling (cf., Subich, 1994). Using the same Rep Test results for personal and career counseling assumes that individuals' careers are very personal to them.

Assessment

Taking a Rep Test helps individuals to articulate their pre-occupations and work values. Discussing their constructs assists them to explore themselves along with their preferences and conflicts. Examining the structure of the construct system often reveals why clients have reached an impasse in the choice process. Counselors help clients to link these impasses to positive and negative features in how they frame their choices (Cochran, 1983, 1992) and suggest strategies for resuming movement along lanes of novel meaning. The published literature provides numerous examples that describe and demonstrate fruitful

methods for assessing vocational construct systems (Bodden, 1970; Brook, 1992; Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Cochran, 1983; Forster, 1992; Metzler & Neimeyer, 1988; Neimeyer, 1988, 1989, 1992; Palmer & Cochran, 1989).

Laddering is another construct assessment technique. Neimeyer (1992, p. 168) conceptualized laddering as a "miniature structured interview" that counselors can use during a session to uncover increasingly superordinate constructs in a client's hierarchy. Rep Grids identify constructs, whereas laddering locates a construct's place in the vocational system. For example, in laddering with the college professor, the counselor could ask the professor to think of teaching, research, and service and then tell how two are similar and different from the third. The response might be that teaching and service involve working with people whereas research means working alone. The counselor then asks "Which do you prefer, working with people or working alone?" When the client responds, the counselor asks "Why?" The professor may choose research and then explain that when he works alone he controls the situation. The counselor then inquires about the opposite of being in control, and ladders up by asking "Why it is important to be in control?" The professor might respond that being in control means being responsible, and the opposite is irresponsible. Laddering continue until it reaches the top of the hierarchy. In this brief example, responsibility resides higher in the hierarchy and thus superordinates both working alone and being in control.

Counseling

Kelly (1955) viewed counseling as a psychological process aimed at changing a client's outlook on some aspect of life. According to Peavy (1993), career counseling is a "process which enables individuals to review, revise, and reorient how they are living their lives and with the assistance of another person who extends respect, cooperation, and hopefulness to them." Peavy (1992) urged constructivist career counselors to (a) forge a cooperative alliance with clients, (b) encourage client self-helpfulness, (c) prompt clients to elaborate and evaluate their construct systems, (d) help clients to reconstruct meaning, and (e) plan with clients how to negotiate social support for their new lines of movement.

General methods. Constructivist career counseling focuses client attention on a "personal theme in need of resolution, clarification, or enhancement" (Cochran, 1992, p. 189). The counseling dialogue seeks to increase self-reflection about meaning and prompt exploration of other ways of seeing and doing. To be truly useful, this self-exploration and experimentation must address what a client puts at stake in career choice. Career decisions involve more than making an occupational choice. Individuals' career decisions articulate their values and make meaning for their life as a whole. In making

occupational choices, clients state self-conceptions toward which they strive. In pursuing that occupation, individuals also resolve, clarify, and enhance their own self-construction.

People seek career counseling when they reach turning points or have been thrown off course. They tell counselors that they are "lost," that is, they do not know what to do or which goals to pursue (Peavy, 1991). In response, the counselor's concentration on personal constructs clarifies where clients stand on relevant issues and thus makes it easier for clients to anticipate possible selves and alternative futures (Brook, 1992). Counseling seeks to reorient clients to help them choose a personally meaningful future. Peavy (1992) views these reorienting decisions as a "steering movement." Counseling proves fruitful when it clarifies alternative choices sufficiently to enhance the client's ability to consciously steer their movement toward meaningful and significant work, that is, labor that implements and supports the self while contributing to the community.

Specific methods. For the first 75 years of this century, vocational guidance counselors typically viewed clients as coming from a homogeneous group needing the same intervention, usually an interest inventory interpretation followed by occupational information. For about the last 20 years, career counselors have viewed clients as coming from heterogeneous groups. Accordingly, counselors have devised ways to assess which clients should get which interventions and when they should receive them. The four stages in Neimeyer's (1988) model for vocational system development provide a focus for selecting differential interventions.

Clients who present with underdeveloped structures, stage one in Neimeyer's model, need wide ranging exploration that increases their fund of occupational information. Rather than interest inventories they may benefit more from work values inventories, especially when counselors use these inventories to clarify values and to create new constructs.

Clients who need to develop a stage-two structure must concentrate on organizing their vocational construct systems. For many years, experts in assessing occupational interests have suggested that, for some clients, the most important outcome of an interest inventory interpretation is a client's learning the scheme used to structure the inventory. For example, in discussing results from the *Strong Interest Inventory* (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994) or the *Self-Directed Search* (Holland, 1985), a client learns how to use the RIASEC hexagonal model (Holland, 1985) to discriminate among and systematically organize six types of occupations. For clients moving toward a stage-two structure, Holland's (1985) typology of occupations or Roe's (1956) field-and-level occupational classification system provides an integrative pattern for organizing their construct systems and resolving fragmentation. These integrative patterns should then be used to guide exploration of a large

group of suitable and viable occupations and to prevent premature closure (or challenge foreclosure), not to prompt an occupational choice.

Counseling to develop a stage-three structure should focus on identifying a handful of specific occupations for in-depth exploration. Counselors could teach clients how to systematically explore these occupations and suggest academic courses and part-time jobs that could prompt relevant new constructs. Supported career exploration that more precisely differentiates the vocational system would be appropriate for all clients moving through a stage-three structure, yet imperative for clients who are starting to question their foreclosure on tightly organized systems. In-depth exploration should result in increasingly fine discriminations among a group of coherent occupations, and these new constructs can eventually prompt the reorganization required at stage four.

Clients who need to develop a stage-four structure must formulate multidimensional discriminations between a few closely-related occupations. These multidimensional constructs and themes need to be integrated in a way that fosters choice. Integration of complex systems prompts commitment to a specified occupational field, and possibly a particular occupation, along with a clear and stable vocational identity. This commitment to a vocational identity and occupational choice moves individuals to prepare for and eventually secure employment in the chosen occupation. Clients who present themselves for career counseling having already developed a stage-four structure typically seek the counselor's reassurance that they have made the right choice.

Application: Forster's GROW

Forster (1992) views constructs as a person's goals or desired anticipations. He applied this view to career counseling in designing the Goals Review and Organizing Workbook (GROW), a particularly effective career intervention for use with groups. The GROW intervention consists of structured exercises based on personal construct psychology. In using the workbook, clients compile and examine their daily activities during the prior week. Next, they use these activities to elicit their personal constructs. After articulating their personal constructs, GROW helps clients use their constructs to formulate explicit career goals. The constructs are turned into 12 goal statements by placing them at the end of two sentence stems: "I want..." or "I want to minimize or avoid..." Then, using paired comparisons, clients rank their twelve goals. Finally, clients rate how well their daily activities implement these goals. GROW fosters self-knowledge by helping clients become aware of their personal constructs, identify the most important ones, and communicate to others their habitual ways for comprehending self and occupations.

BIOGRAPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

A second major constructivist approach to career counseling originated with Super's (1954) life history model for career pattern counseling. Today called biographical hermeneutics (Bujold, 1990), this psychobiographical construction of careers shares personal construct psychology's concentration on self-conceiving and self-organizing processes.

Super (1954) urged counselors to adopt a subjective perspective on career to enlarge the vista provided by the objective perspective on occupations. In proposing the concept of subjective career, Super distinguished it from the traditional definition of (objective) career, which denotes the sequence of occupational positions that individuals hold during their work lives. Subjective career denotes a personal construction, a thought that involves a person's longitudinal perspective, in the present, on the remembered vocational past and anticipated vocational future. Subjective career forms a superordinate construct, a meaning-making pattern, that individuals use to organize and explain their own vocational development and work roles (Young & Valach, 1996). The objective occupational perspective concentrates on differences both between individuals and between occupations. In contrast, the subjective career perspective concentrates on differences within individuals across time, that is, how individuals have become who they are and how they can develop in the future. Taking both perspectives, that of differences between individuals and development within an individual, deepens the meaningfulness and strengthens the effectiveness of career counseling.

The objective occupational and subjective career perspectives conceptualize clients from different vantage points. From the objective perspective, counselors attribute recurring uniformities in an individual's behavior to "traits," such as extroversion and conscientiousness. "Trait-and-factor" counselors indirectly measure client traits with self-report, psychometric instruments. They sketch the resulting trait scores on psychographs to objectively characterize the person in comparison to relevant normative groups. Counselors use the psychograph of trait scores in an *actuarial* fashion to estimate probabilities of an individual succeeding in and being satisfied with various occupations. After matching the client's aptitude and interest profiles to those required in diverse occupations, the counselor or the computer recommends fitting occupations for the client to explore.

Super (1954) suggested that counselors augment trait theory, with its actuarial methods and psychometric instruments, by using life history theory and biographical methods that recognize the significance of personal experience. This personal perspective can help clients understand their actions and choices *from their own point of view*. When they take the subjective perspective, counselors learn that individuals do not explain their behavior in terms of traits. Instead, individuals attribute actions, their own and those of

other people, to intentions; moreover, they attribute recurring uniformities in their behavior to continuity in intentions. People operate in the world based on the meaning that they give to situations. Counselors can use these self-attributed tendencies and patterns to interpret clients' career patterns, from the subject's own perspective.

Biographical-Hermeneutic Model of Careers

Counselors who construe careers through life histories take the biographical-hermeneutic approach to constructivist career counseling (Ochberg, 1988). Young and Collin (1988, 1992) were among the first to explicitly apply hermeneutical canons for knowledge production to constructing careers. They emphasized the subjective perspective of life histories in writing that "biography is concerned with the phenomenal role of lived experience" (Collin & Young, 1986, p. 847). Counselors gather autobiographical accounts from their clients, and then use psychological interpretation to construct a coherent, unifying life theme with which to elucidate and pattern the life history. Because the interpretation systematically applies principles of personality psychology, the results may be called a psychobiography. Systematic interpretation is so central to the biographical hermeneutics that the approach takes half of its name from *hermeneuein*, a Greek word meaning "to interpret."

Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, provides principles and methods for comprehending the central meaning in life histories and thus understanding them as psychobiography. Hermeneutics originated as part of a rebellion against church authorities who used dogma to dictate the meaning of the bible. Independent scholars sought to reconstruct what a biblical passage really meant to its author. To determine this intrinsic meaning, they created systematic principles to guide the extraction of meaning from the text itself, eschewing the use of church doctrine to interpret the bible. These canons rest on the axiom that the meaning of a passage in a text should be understood from the perspective of the author's intentions and the text as a whole. The application of hermeneutic canons produces *understanding* that is intrinsic to the text, not *explanation* based on extrinsic dogma.

Hermeneutics offers counselors established canons and systematized procedures to increase the meaningfulness and accuracy in a psychobiography. A "hermeneutic circle" provides the main interpretive method. The method operates in a circular, dialectic fashion to interpret an unknown "whole" by referring to what is already known, that is, the parts. Interpretation occurs in a circle of understanding—parts are seen in the whole and the whole is seen through its constituent parts. Initially, episodes shape the whole, but as interpretation proceeds, theme formation integrates episodes so that the theme dialectically shapes the episodes. This dialectic synthesis subsumes the parts into fewer and fewer images as it progressively becomes more inclusive. The

hermeneutic circle creates an evermore integrated whole that interprets and incorporates the particulars while the particulars construct the whole. "A story's parts and its whole must, as it were, be made to live together" (Bruner, 1996, p. 137). Note that the "whole" or "narrative truth" constructed by the hermeneutic circle differs from scientific fact. Science validates its facts by correspondence to external reality. Hermeneutics validates its plausibility through negotiating consensus and intersubjective agreement as well as by demonstrating coherence, internal consistency, and pragmatic usefulness. The whole is not true factually, yet it is true in the sense in which carpenters use true to mean level, balanced, and capable of sustaining a structure. A coherent and consistent whole, or life theme, "stands under" a life to support present meaning and sustain future planning.

Constructivist career counselors use the hermeneutic circle to weave together, as parts and whole, the particular strands of life history accounts and the general life theme. The biographical theme derives its meaning from individual episodes, yet the theme governs interpretation of its constituent episodes. Counselors interpret specific details in a life history as part of the life pattern's global structure. The theme produces a convincing account of the meaning of the client's life history and counselors use it, in a hermeneutic circle, to make past episodes, present experiences, and future ambitions more intelligible and available to inform career decision making and life planning.

Hermeneutic knowing has singular relevance for understanding human lives. A life, having been lived, creates a text which is available for hermeneutic interpretation (Ricoeur, 1971). Hermeneutic methods are particularly appropriate for interpreting the career texts that clients bring to counseling because, according to Taylor (1971), hermeneutics is most apt when a text is "confused, incomplete, cloudy." The biographical-hermeneutic approach to constructivist career counseling seeks to compile a career text or life history and then to understand the connecting theme that produces a coherent, unified psychobiography. Thus, the biographical-hermeneutic approach to careers elicits client life histories, applies hermeneutic interpretation methods to understand the life theme, and then extends the resulting psychobiography into the future as a basis for career decision making and life planning.

Life History Psychology

The theoretical model for biographical-hermeneutical career counseling draws on two traditions in personality psychology—the ego psychologies of Adler (1956) and Erikson (1968) and the personological psychologies of Allport (1961) and Murray (1938). These two life history traditions share a common belief that all people have psychological problems and overcoming these problems is the most important issue in a life (Hogan, 1983). Both ego-psychology and personological psychology center their attention beneath the

surface of manifest behavior and objective traits to focus on latent motives, either psychogenic needs or life themes.

Adaptation. Life history theories agree that life themes deal with adaptation and therefore they each concentrate attention on adapting and moving toward the goal of overcoming adversity. Adaptation can be broadly defined as "improvements in the organism's pattern of interaction with its environment which increase its chance for survival, cultural self-realization, and perpetuation of the type" (Rado, 1969, pp. 7-8). Constructs are adaptive tools that "provide us with an instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world" (Vaihinger, 1924, p. 15). Thus, the construct pattern or life theme reveals how and in which direction an individual moves to become more whole.

Mastery. Adaptation always moves toward the general goal of increased mastery or self-expansion (Angyal, 1965), from patient to agent. Human beings do all they can to grow toward a subjectively defined final goal. Adler (1956) described this line of movement as going from a felt negative to a perceived plus. Freud (1948), in stating the seminal paradigm for ego psychology, believed that each individual must turn "it into I" by actively mastering what they passively suffer. The most elegant statement of this mastery paradigm appears in Milton's (1940/1667, p. 33) *Paradise Lost*. Upon arriving in hell, Lucifer turns to his followers and says, "Our torments also may, in length of time become our elements." Lucifer explains to his followers, like a counselor advises clients, that adaptation involves appropriating our own pain to come terms with existence (Ochberg, 1988).

Continuity, character, and identity. The goal of perfecting oneself or becoming more complete, by actively mastering what has been passively suffered, is not an immediate goal, like finishing a book. Instead, it is a life goal toward which the individual continually yearns and strives yet can never fully reach. This continuous striving toward greater wholeness structures a coherent and continuous self as individuals follow their line of movement across the life course. The line of movement or life theme composes behavioral episodes into a meaningful whole. A life theme gives the individual meaning and distinction, like the ideé fix or leitmotif in a piece of music by Berlioz or Wagner. The life theme makes the person self-consistent, and thus intelligible to the self and identifiable by other people. Lacking self-consistency, an individual would be only a collection of behaviors lacking direction. Similar to a musical melody transposed to another key, a person changes yet, in some important sense, remains the same. If this were not true, then we would not have a person. So, while behaviors and strategies for living change and are transposed as the individual adapts and develops, the life theme remains constant. The enhancement and enlargement of the adaptive repertoire does

not change the goal and life plan, it only improves the methods for moving forward.

The methods for moving forward provide the substance of character and psychosocial identity. Character means one's general way of being, with its definite pattern and organized style of adapting. Repetition of choices, based on one's constructs, reflexively engraves a relatively stable character. Character is "consistent reflective choosing, not something behind it" (Kamler, 1994, p. 153). Identity involves recognition, by self and others, of one's characteristic choices. "Ego identity, then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods, the style of one's individuality, and that this style coincides with the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for significant others in the immediate community" (Erikson, 1968, p. 50).

Life themes. Each distinct school of thought in life history psychology uses a distinctive concept with which to guide the hermeneutic search for a life-defining theme in autobiographical accounts. These unifying concepts supply a lens with which to recognize the unique pattern in life episodes. Each one takes a slightly different vantage point from which to observe the whole. Nevertheless, each one looks for the same whole, one subjectively constructed by the unique individual. It is important to remember to use these lenses to recognize the meaning of experience to the subjects, from their own point of view. The unifying concepts should never be used as preconceived patterns to impose on a life history.

The unifying concepts are as varied in name, yet as similar in content, as Adler's (1956) life style, Allport's (1961) proprium, Berne's (1972) script, Erikson's (1968) ego-identity, Kelly's (1955) core role, Lecky's (1945) self-consistency, McAdam's (1993) personal myth, Murray's (1938) unity theme, Reich's (1933) character, and Sartre's (1943) project. These unifying concepts are each variants of the fundamental concept—life theme. Each concept is useful in making meaning of a life, if not reliable in producing scientific explanation, to the degree that it can be used in the hermeneutic circle to compose a unique life theme.

Life themes involve blueprints for living, they structure how events are remembered and new experiences encountered (Ochberg, 1988). They are ideological simplifications that organize experience into a convincing construction that satisfies the adaptive needs of the individual. Csikszentmihaly and Beattie (1979) offer the best introduction to the use of life-theme concepts in career counseling. Based on an examination of life theme concepts in different personality theories, they produced an integrative definition of life theme—"a problem or set of problems which a person wishes to resolve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve solution" (p. 50). They conclude, based on clinical studies of 30 biographies, that life themes

develop in four steps: (1) recognize an existential stress, (2) label the main problem, (3) state the cause of the problem in form that allows a solution, and (4) adopt a method of solving the problem. Note that, in many ways, this sequence of life-theme development provides a viable outline for stages in career counseling.

Biographical-Hermeneutic Methods for Career Counseling

The biographical-hermeneutic approach to constructivist career counseling seeks to help individuals articulate how they conceive of their project as a human being. It starts with an assessment that elicits a life history and interprets life themes. It then moves to counseling that helps clients to understand their themes and extend them into the future to clarify choices and enhance decision making.

Assessment

When conducting a career pattern assessment, counselors act more like biographers than actuaries. They focus on life stories rather than test scores, and on enabling action rather than matching people to positions. In taking a subjective and longitudinal perspective on lives, counselors ask clients to produce autobiographical accounts and documents that describe formative and defining events in their lives. Counselors also may elicit subjective meaning from clients by using projective techniques (Watkins & Savickas, 1990). Counselors use the hermeneutic circle to interpret the resulting text and to understand the recurring themes and underlying trends that unify the life history into a psychobiography.

In applying hermeneutic canons to autobiographical accounts, Kockelmans (1975) outlined five principles that, in the career realm, direct counselors to (a) collect ample life history material from clients, (b) respect clients' uniqueness in not requiring their psychobiographies to fit preconceived life themes, (c) try to understand clients' life themes at their deepest level, (d) use the hermeneutic circle to produce a psychobiography adequate for the needs of career decision making, and (e) explicate each life theme's present meaning and future extrapolation.

Problems and solutions. In constructing a life theme using the hermeneutic circle, counselors strive to recognize a client's life line by first defining two points—the problem and perceived solution. The ego psychology and personological approaches both apply the hermeneutic circle to identify unique life themes, from clients' points of view, by uncovering existential problems and life goals. Nevertheless, they each use different tactics to identify these two defining points in a life line.

Counselors who take the personological perspective on life histories (Allport, 1961; Murray, 1938) elicit biographical material from personal documents, interviews, and autobiographies (Annis, 1967) as well as from projective techniques such as the Thematic Apperception Test (Murray, 1938). They then study these materials to assess client needs and values. Needs, or what the person requires to feel secure, reveal the problem. The pattern of needs defines which goals have value or meaning to the individual (Angyal, 1941) in resolving the problem. Values denote the objects or gratifications in the world that people seek to satisfy their needs. Values are general goals which confirm who we are and what we wish to become. They signal a commitment to a way of life. In addition, values are communal and consequential because, as community sanctioned ways to meet needs, they relate the individual to the community (Bruner, 1990).

Career counselors who take the ego-psychology approach elicit autobiographical accounts using structured career interviews, such as those adapted from Transactional Analysis to uncover scripts (Kurtz, 1974) and from Individual Psychology to uncover lifestyles (McKelvie & Friedland, 1978). From client autobiographical accounts, they identify the central problems and goals. For example, Savickas (1995b) described a procedure for uncovering clients' problems and goals. He identifies the problem from clients' early recollections (McKelvie, 1979) about their childhoods. These prototypical memories reveal the tacit pre-occupations and plots that organize a client's life. Clients reveal their goals, or envisioned solutions to their problems, in describing role models. These models propose cultural scripts that individuals can follow to solve different problems. Savickas believes that the early recollections show the tension whereas role models show the intention. Connecting tension to intention, or problem to goal, suggests a line of interests.

Interests. The next step in biographical-hermeneutical assessment for both the ego-psychology and personological approaches involves interpreting the life theme by connecting the problems and goals with interests. Interests bridge from id to ego, from it to I, from felt negative to perceived plus, and from needs to values. In Latin, *inter est* means "to be between," that is, between an individual and her or his subjective construction of environmental opportunities to become more whole. Interests, as solutions to problems in growing up (Carter, 1940), portray how individuals subjectively plan to transcend previous limitations and become more complete. They guide the line of movement along the career path. Interests express anticipation and intentionality as they stretch out to impose direction on future vocational behavior (Miller-Tiedeman, & Tiedeman, 1985).

Psychobiography and character. The interaction among needs-values-interests or problems-goals-solutions constitutes the life theme and plots the

client's line of movement. In identifying the life theme, a counselor has formed the whole from its constituent parts. Next, continuing to use the hermeneutic circle, the counselor must understand the parts (autobiographical accounts) in the sense of the whole (theme). Like actors must study their roles in a play, counselors must study and unify the life history to understand the client's role in life, that is, character. In his celebrated system for teaching acting, Stanislavsky emphasized that each character in a play has an overall objective that conditions all of her or his behavior throughout the play. This superobjective welds together all aspects of the role and the actor must know the superobjective in order to enact an integrated and purposeful character in each scene (Levin & Levin, 1992). Similarly, the counselor must use the client's life theme, with its superobjective, to comprehend and bind together life history episodes into a coherent and consistent psychobiography. The psychobiography describes both the client's life theme and its particular life history episodes framed in terms of that theme. Near the end of the psychobiography, many counselors include a mapping sentence that succinctly summarizes the meaning of an interesting occupation.

Mapping sentences. The career implications of a psychobiography can be succinctly stated in a mapping sentence that connects the objective occupation to the subjective career. Cochran (1997), Kurtz (1974), and Savickas (1989) each urge counselors to use objective and subjective methods in tandem. Focusing on either the public occupation or personal career alone produces a unidimensional view of a client. Used in tandem, the dual perspectives on the individual's work role produces a more complex, realistic, and meaningful life portrait of a client.

Osherson (1980) provided a format for an "objective + subjective" mapping sentence that follows from his distinction between the public and personal meanings of an occupational choice. The objective, public meaning of an occupational role involves attributes that make that job attractive. Subjective, personal meaning underlies public meaning. Osherson (1980, p. 25) provided an elegant format for a mapping sentence. With slight modifications, it reads: I will become an *occupational choice* to *role attributes* (the public meaning), so that *personal meaning*. For example, the mapping sentence in one medical student's psychobiography read, "I will become a physician to fight disease, so that I can conquer my own fear of death and finally earn my mother's respect." The public meaning in this sentence indicates her intended social contribution and the personal meaning expresses her life themes. This integrative choice lets her actively master the passive suffering she experienced when she observed her father die slowly from cancer.

Counseling

The transition from assessment to counseling begins when a counselor narrates a client's psychobiography, with its life theme, character sketch, and mapping sentence. The counselor uses the psychobiography to increase clients' self-knowledge and to help them comprehend the thematic lines of development along which they guide their lives (McAdams, 1985). The counselor explains the theme to the client as "living out of a solution to an existential problem as a central project of life" (Cochran, 1991, p. 23). The theme is organized around certain problems, and the central life project involves working toward solutions to these core problems. The counselor treats the theme as a motif, or concise classification of important experiences. Used in this way, the theme clarifies the emerging drama and predicts the future.

After the initial reading of the psychobiography, the client and counselor collaborate to revise and further clarify the motivational themes that shape the client's character. Collaborative editing of the psychobiography prompts clients to think about their lives in terms of larger meanings. It encourages them to make additional connections, thus constructing a clearer, deeper, and more enduring meaning for their lives. The emerging drama is sufficiently clarified when clients can understand and explain their life themes as solutions to their problems in growing up and as projects worthy of a life's devotion. This collaborative revision continues until it's subject, the client, authorizes the psychobiography as a useful tool for comprehending his or her life. Then, the counselor assists the client to extend the psychobiography into the future as a basis for career decision making and life planning.

Thematic-extrapolation. Extending the psychobiography and its theme into the future provides a basis for making educational/vocational choices and life plans. Super (1954) called this primary method for biographical-hermeneutic counseling "extrapolation based on thematic analysis." He viewed it as the "developmental method" for matching people to positions, and proposed it as an alternative to trait-and-factor methods (Super, 1961). "In the life pattern approach an attempt is made to project trends into the future, to extrapolate, modifying each 'thema' in the light of others in order to predict future development and behavior" (Super, 1954, pp. 13-14). The psychobiography and its thematic extension into the future should help clients impose direction on their vocational behavior by clarifying their career goals and the means to reach these goals. In discussing how their themes might stretch out into the future, counselors strive to foster in clients a sense of unity and purpose, that is, a feeling of wholeness and a confidence that their lives are moving in a self-charted direction. The theme's future extension should help to clarify alternative choices and thus make it easier for clients to make career decisions.

This career clarification helps clients to consider how personal projects can be validated and advanced through social occupations. The counselor assists this process by encouraging clients to view occupational roles as enabling personal solutions that, through contribution and cooperation, embed them in a community. Connecting personal themes to social occupations, in due course, leads clients to make career decisions that offer the potential to turn their personal minus into a social plus, to make them more whole by continuing to actively master what they have passively suffered.

The fruitfulness of a decision and the usefulness of a choice increases when clients self-consciously integrate their personal projects with social contributions. Focusing either on private victories or social contributions leads to selfish or selfless choices, neither of which can provide a "true" (i.e., level, balanced, stable) solution to problems in living. Individuals must integrate personal projects with community contributions in a way that balances getting and giving, that is, makes a living by what they get and makes a life by they give.

Applications: Kurtz's Scripts and Savickas' Styles

The most effective biographical-hermeneutical counseling methods incorporate the objective perspective on occupations with the subjective perspective on career. For example, Kurtz's (1974) application of script analysis to career counseling aptly combines the two perspectives. After briefly explaining the basic tenets of Transactional Analysis, the counselor helps clients to engage in three Parent Ego-State exercises that uncover parental influences on their values and careers. Next, two Child Ego-State exercises help clients to understand their fantasies and needs as these pertain to career decision making. Following this exploration of the subjective perspective, attention turns to the objective perspective. The Adult Ego-State exercise reflects the objective perspective in using aptitude test scores to rationally consider important facts about the client's talents and a *Strong Interest Inventory* profile (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994) to evaluate the client's similarity to people already employed in preferred occupations. In the final exercise, clients use script analysis to interpret their life themes and understand their lives as unfolding dramas. Counseling culminates as counselors assist clients to integrate the outcomes from all six exercises, including subjective understandings and objective facts, in formulating a list of specific occupations to explore in-depth.

Savickas' (1989) application of Individual Psychology's lifestyle counseling (Adler, 1956) blends biographical-hermeneutical methods with Holland's (1985) actuarial methods. Intervention starts with a structured interview that elicits autobiographical accounts using a sequence of eight stimulus questions

about role models, favorite books, magazines, leisure activities, school subjects, mottos, ambitions, and decisions. Clinical assessment of client responses to the eight topics of inquiry identifies the subjective career theme as well as produces an objective occupational theme in the form of a RIASEC code (Holland, 1985). Combining the public meaning, social contribution, and personal meaning composes a psychobiography that includes a character sketch, life theme, superobjective, and mapping sentence. The counselor uses the resulting psychobiography to elucidate the client's career path, vocational interests, and occupational prospects.

The counselor frequently refers to the psychobiography and the idea that occupations foster active mastery and promote self-completion as counseling progresses, and occasionally recycles, through seven structured phases: (1) discussing the psychobiography with the client, (2) examining the life theme as its affects career decision making, (3) considering how clients' interests scripts the next chapter in their psychobiographies by pointing to certain occupations as useful in actively mastering what has been passively suffer, (4) preparing a list of occupations and strategies for in-depth exploration, (5) reviewing exploration outcomes in terms of the psychobiography, (6) making tentative educational/vocational choices, and (7) planning to garner social support for a choice and to cope with choice barriers.

NARRATIVE PARADIGM

The third, and most recent, constructivist approach to career counseling integrates the personal-construct and biographical-hermeneutic approaches into a more comprehensive approach with the idea that narration constructs meaning. With regard to the work role, narration forms career as a superordinate construct which guides action along thematic lines of development. Narration of work-related stories shapes the meaning of career and guides vocational action. Peavy (1993) astutely observed that the Greek word for "narration" is *diegesis*, meaning to establish an itinerary. Narrative guidance, what ego-psychology views as the prime role of the ego or "I," imparts identity by telling who we are, how we got that way, and where we are going (Taylor, 1989). Career narratives guide how individuals enact the work role. In addition to asserting that narration constructs career, the narrative paradigm highlights the momentous idea that the narrated career is socially constructed through dialogues with significant others (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1995). The narrative paradigm interprets career as process that "people intentionally engage in to acquire social meaning within the frame of their lives" (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, p. 364).

Narrative Model of Careers

Recent developments in the basic science of psychology position narratives at the core of thinking, memory, and language. Basic scientists' current conceptualizations of the role of narratives in human functioning has prompted career counselors to view career as a narrative. Conceptualizing career as a narrative that an individual tells about one's life encourages counselors to concentrate on client stories and to privilege the subjective perspective of the client. Within a career story, the vocation is not a job but rather the pattern of meaning one lives. The sense of vocation provides a center for the "regent drama that endures over a lifetime" (Cochran, 1990a, p. 172). The client constructs career through self-told stories that connect and organize action into a meaningful pattern, one that highlights a sense of unity and sense of vocation. Career coheres around a purposeful and continuous direction which guides the individual's actions across the life course.

Career as Story

During modernity, the dominant metaphor in comprehending career has been that of a path through an organization. Biographical-hermeneutics views career as the theme of a vocational text. Cochran (1991) and Jepsen (1992) have offered a different metaphor for understanding careers—"career as story." Cochran believes that narratives are the basis for meaning-making in career development because in stories individuals select out what they wish to emphasize and deemphasize. Cochran (1994) explained that both stories and careers contain two basic elements: action and temporal organization. In career, the action consists of productive work whereas organization involves the temporal integration of present experience with memories of the past and anticipations for the future. Thus career is a story about one's work role, which an individual constructs in the present, to explain one's vocational past and future.

Jepsen (1992) explained that a career and a story both include the five elements of the "dramatic pentad" conceived by the celebrated literary critic Kenneth Burke (1945). An *agent* narrates the story and authors the career. The *setting* is the context in which the story or career occurs, and it usually contains significant people including family, friends, and co-workers. The agent's story describes *action* plotted toward a *goal* that can satisfy the agent's personal needs and work values. The agent uses an *instrument* to secure the goal. Jepsen suggests that career instruments include the agent's abilities and skills as well as social resources. According to Burke (1945), trouble, or the topic of the story, derives from imbalances in the elements of the pentad. Jepsen speculated that career troubles emerge from mismatches between (a) instruments and goals, (b) actions and goals, or (c) the agent and the goals.

Bruner (1996) added an epistemic element to dramatic pentad—the agent's internal struggle to make meaning in a rapidly changing society. This struggle to make sense of self and a confusing world seems to be at the core of career indecision.

Career Decisions

A career decision concerns who individuals are and how they will live their lives. In important career decisions, "the person feels at stake because the values at issue are self-defining and life defining" (Cochran, 1991, p. 12). From the objective perspective, indecision is viewed as a list of decision making difficulties, often rooted in maladjustment or psychopathology (Savickas, 1995c). Constructivists view indecision as a signal that transformation is in progress (Cochran, 1991). From this vantage point, indecision is normal when people are about to lose or to change their place. As they lose and then make a new place, they forge a new identity and elaborate their life stories.

Constructivists define indecision as a purposive and healthy interruption of movement designed "to let meaning catch up with doing. Individuals pause in indecision to gain a fuller sense of meaning before acting" (Cochran, 1991, p. 87). In doing indecision, individuals pause or hesitate in their movement as they steer through a turning point. To use Cochran's (1991) elegant term, indecision means wavering. This wavering hesitation involves "movement toward meaning" rather than toward goal. Wavering leans backward to bring forward from the past fundamental life motives to guide the transformation. It leans forward toward the future to bring back to the present possible selves and occupational daydreams. Counselors can help clients during periods of normal hesitation by clarifying these motives and aspirations as narrative plots that structure their career stories. The newly clarified plots can be used to choose a new location and then plan how to move to and in this new situation.

Narrative Methods for Career Counseling

Based on the "career as story" metaphor, Jepsen (1992) proposed that having clients describe their careers is an important form of career counseling because it enlightens the agent and the audience, that is, the client and the counselor. Storytelling, as a means of explaining one's troubles, comes easily to most people. People of any age can tell their life story with authority. The process of telling the story integrates everyday occurrences into episodes of one story. The story defines and forms goals and instruments, thus structuring agentic action in work settings. In telling the story, a client makes and stores meaning. Thus storytelling, or constructing a narrative account, develops a career through interpreting and organizing meaning. This may be the sense with which Carlsen (1988) called career a "carrier of meaning" and Miller-Tiedeman and

Tiedeman (1985) called career "the imposition of direction on vocational behavior."

The view that agents construct their careers through narration leads to a conceptualization of career counseling as the process of enhancing the narratability of the client's life. Cochran (1991) concluded that clients who could not narrate their lives, that is speak the pattern that connects, make fragmentary choices that further obscure their lives. He explained that fragmentary choices reflect some segment of the life that is narratable, a segmented episode rather than the whole life. A client's story is clarified and made more narratable when the counselor focuses attention on how the career problem fits within the pattern of larger meanings being lived by the client. The career decision itself can be best understood through comprehending the whole story that embeds it (Cochran, 1991). Thus, the narrative approach to assessment concentrates on understanding the story's plot.

Assessment

Assessment starts with listening to clients narrate episodes in their career stories. Cochran (in press) views career assessment as shifting through masses of data and facts to write a narrative that has a consistent pattern of meaning. Jepsen (1992) agrees and suggests that the stories having been told create data in the form of a manuscript which is available for close reading and editing (White & Epston, 1990). Together author and editor, client and counselor, examine the manuscript's plots, turning points, and endings to highlight the dominant story line and the most important single scene. Jepsen (1992) reported that after examining many episodes, a "wholeness" will emerge, and it will frame better understanding of the separate episodes. This close reading can focus on the client's (a) past pattern, (b) present identity, and (c) future aspirations (Savickas, 1991a).

Patterning the unfolding life. The first goal in closely reading narratives is to identify the pattern of the unfolding life, that is, to discern the plot by which individuals connect events into a continuous whole that endows meaning. Cochran and Laub (1995) noted that a plot is not a chronology but an explanation, a theory of what leads from a particular beginning to a particular end. A chronicle describes a sequence of events without explanation whereas a story sequences events and explains the sequence with a coherent plot. To illustrate the difference between chronicle and story, Cochran (1990b, p. 77) cited Forster's (1927) example concerning a king and queen. In a chronicle, the king died and then the queen died. In a story, the king died and then the queen died from grief. Grief provides a plot that connects the two events and makes the important point.

The usual plot or point in career stories explains how an incomplete or imperfect individual, who's living situation deviates from normal expectations,

moves toward greater completeness. Stories explain the change (or mastery) that occurs from the beginning to an end (Cochran, 1990b). The beginning describes some the troubling situation, one that drives the rest of the story. Without trouble, there would be no need for a story. This personal incompleteness and situational disturbance point to the end, in the form of a goal or an ideal situation that provides what the main character wants or lacks. The middle of the story describes the means and obstacles involved in working toward the personal goal and ideal situation.

To identify plots, counselors listen to how clients move to increase completeness and resolve trouble. Young, Valach, and Collin (1995, p. 500) sagely warned that "too tight" a narrative construction of a plot can become a problem. Plots must provide adequate room for variation around context and unique situations. In fact, counselors and clients who wish to avoid tight story lines may construct more than one plot, and write a narrative that weaves a complicated tapestry of storylines.

Give form to identity. The second goal in assessing storyful narratives is to give form to the client's identity. In Cochran's (1991, p. 64) words, "from scattered fragments, a person frames a coherent integration of one's incompleteness." Identity has a double meaning in the narrative paradigm. Identity arises from both the story told (narrative content) and the story teller (narratability process). Forming an identity, in the narrative view, involves clearly describing oneself as an active agent in one's own stories, that is, being both author of and protagonist in a story. Identity is shown both by an agentic character and narratability. Narratability involves the individual's ability to articulate a coherent and credible life story that portrays formative and definitive incidents. Narrating one's stories clarifies who one is and, thus, creates self-knowledge and develops identity. Career choice problems that adolescents and young adults experience may occur, in part, because they either do not know their stories (narrative content) or how to tell them to other people (narratability process). What counselors call identity formation may be understood as a developmental process in which one goes from implicitly living one's stories to first explicitly knowing one's stories and then comfortably narrating them.

Imagine the future. The third goal in assessing narratives is to recognize clients' ambitions and dreams for the future. Imaginative stories that deal with a day in the future, future autobiographies, occupational daydreams, and hypothetical obituaries all reveal how clients foresee the unwritten chapters in their life stories (Savickas, 1991b). In extending a plot line imaginatively into the future, the counselor recognizes the turning point faced by the client, that is, the heart of the impasse. Clarifying the choices, at the turning point enhances the client's ability to decide. Having examined the turning point, the

counselor concludes assessment by drafting a guiding narrative that makes explicit the plot of a client's unfolding life, pictures a clear and stable identity, and gives voice to future aspirations and ambitions. A life-enhancing and generative narrative of their lives helps clients to see clearly what is at stake, the alternative choices, and the decision to be made. Assessment turns to counseling when the counselor narrates this draft to the client.

Counseling

Counseling starts with the counselor telling a continuous narrative about a client's pattern of living and the constellation of choices that she or he now face. Counselors then use this narrative to resolve doubt and reduce confusion by framing the indecision problem within the client's ongoing life story. There are no isolated choice; all choices are embedded within an ongoing pattern of living. Connecting today's indecision to yesterday's experience and tomorrow's possibilities makes meaning, allows comprehension, and creates new possibilities. In short, clarifying the content of their narratives and enhancing the narratability of their lives prepares clients to make career decisions.

In narrating a life story, counselors should emphasize continuity, coherence, and causality (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1995). Coherence means that the temporal ordering or sequence makes sense. Continuity means the story is constructed in terms of goal-directed action. Causality means giving a good reason to explain what happened. This good reason should highlight client purposiveness and attribute outcomes to client effort and agency. Counselors' narratives should emphasize how the agent's choices purposively implement values and ideals.

Agency is a particularly important focus in narrative career counseling because people who seek counseling lack an agentic plot, do not recognize it, or are living a patient plot. Thus, they seek to clarify or author an agentic plot. Accordingly, in reconstructing and narrating client plots, counselors should increase clients' sense of mastery by portraying them as agents who control the plot (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1995) as well as select and shape the settings in which they strive for goals, overcome barriers, and actualize ideals (Cochran & Laub, 1995).

Application: Cochran's Narrative Career Counseling

Cochran (1997) has devised an innovative approach to career counseling that helps clients script career narratives in which they play characters who engage in productive, meaningful, and satisfying work. Cochran characterizes his model for narrative career counseling with seven "episodes." The first three episodes involve meaning making through the construction of career narratives.

Then three enactment episodes actualize the narratives by exploring their suitability and viability. The seventh episode crystallizes a decision.

Construction episodes. The first construction episode finds and "elaborates a career problem." Cochran (1985, p. 145) views a career problem as a "gap between what is and what ought to be." The counselor formulates the problem as a storyline in which the current situation serves as the beginning and the desired situation serves as the ending. When the gap has been defined, and a working alliance has been established, it is time for the second construction episode. In "composing a life," the counselor conducts a pattern probe into clients' life histories to learn about needs, values, interests, and abilities as well as to understand how clients organize their storylines to describe who they are and how they got that way. Then the counselor strives to articulate a unifying plot based on fundamental and deeply meaningful motives. Cochran suggests that an effective composition of the life history helps to form career by dramatizing the important tension, highlighting continuity of character, emphasizing personal causality, and giving the life a point (Cochran, 1991). This episode concludes when the counselor has composed the life history into a justification, or background, for a more meaningful, productive, and satisfying narrative to come. Cochran describes the third construction episode as "founding a future narrative." The client must decide at this turning point what to bring forward into the future and what to leave behind. The narrative about the future should identify how clients will use their fundamental motives, strongest interests and values, and most reliable strengths to attain their goals. The future narrative should show how the plots in the old story can be harmonious integrated into a new story.

Enactment episodes. The first actualizing episode involves "constructing a reality" by exploring the future narrative with its "promissory position" (Cochran, 1991, p. 76). Exploratory and information-seeking behaviors submit the future narrative to a reality test. The outcome is whether or not one feels "typecast" for the occupational role portrayed in the future narrative (Cochran & Laub, 1995), that is, moved to enter the occupation. If so, the second enactment episode, "changing a life structure," involves rearranging one's life situation to permit enacting the preferred occupation. This rearrangement often requires exploration, struggle, ad negotiation with significant others such as marriage partners and parents (Young, Valach, Paseluikho, Dover, Matthes, Paproski, & Sankey, 1997). Counselors can assist clients in this episode by strengthening their resolve and encouraging clients to articulate their missions to significant others. Young, Valach, and Collin (1995) wisely instruct counselors that when clients negotiate career narratives with significant others, they socially construct their own lives and how they will participate in society. Young and his colleagues (1997) conceptualize career conversations as joint

actions determined by the dialogue, not by either individual. From this social constructivist perspective, the joint action of dialogue helps to constructs career through social, historical, and cultural relationships and through intentional, goal-directed actions.

The third actualizing episode involves "enacting a role." The client brings the future narrative into the present by actualizing its ideals now. This behavioral linkage fosters a sense of continuity and feelings of optimism about the achievability of goals (Savickas, 1991b). For example, if the desired end in the future narrative is to be an artist, one starts painting tonight. Or, if the goal is to be a counselor, one starts this week to regularly help people survive life crises. Activities that pull the future into the present bridge the gap between is and ought. These activities also affirm clients' purposeful direction and forward movement as they write the middle of the story.

Crystallizing a decision. For Cochran (1997), crystallization of a decision means solidifying "a future representation of career that emplots a person as a main character within a more ideal career narrative and that is adapted for a particular option." For many clients, the actual crystallization of a decision may be almost anti-climatic after they have constructed and explored a future narrative, and changed situations to permit it. Nevertheless, a decision brings closure. Cochran describes crystallizing decisions that commit individuals to three different types of movement: (a) advanced exploration of a specific occupation, (b) implementation of an occupational choice by pursuing the necessary training or securing a position, or (c) reconstruction of the future narrative as a basis for recycling through the enactment episodes.

CONCLUSION

Constructivist metatheory already has produced three compelling models for expanding and improving career theory and practice. The personal construct, biographical hermeneutic, and narrative models for careers comfortably and comprehensively meet the needs of clients who must make career decisions and plan their lives during a time of rapid change in society and its occupations. Constructivism's concentration on self-conceiving, self-organizing processes enables individuals to fashion careers that carry meaning for their lives and impose personal direction on their vocational behavior. Furthermore, constructivist career counseling is revitalizing the interest of counselors in their clients' work roles by making career counseling more complex, personal, and therapeutic. Just as objectivist theory with its trait-and-factor methods fit the modern industrial society of the twentieth century, so may constructivist theory with its interpretive methods fit the postmodern information society of the twenty-first century.

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