

## **Counseling for Career Construction and Life Design**

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Counseling differs from vocational guidance and career education/coaching. If clients simply want academic advice or vocational guidance about whom they *resemble*, then counselors use interest inventories and aptitude tests to match a client to occupations and programs of study. If clients seek help in getting *ready* to cope with developmental tasks, then counselors use the techniques of career education and psychosocial coaching to teach clients skills that increase their adaptability—including competencies such as information seeking, decision making, and planning. If clients want to *reflect* on their identities as part of career construction and life design, then counselors use the techniques of biographical reasoning and narrative counseling to foster meaning making and transformative action. Of course, counseling may include attention to *match making* and *self-management* yet its core distinction is the focus on *meaning making*.

### **Career Construction Counseling**

When individuals seek career counseling, they have stories to tell about their working lives. The stories usually report how they have been dislocated from an occupational plot that they had been pursuing or about how they have completed a chapter in their career and need to turn to a new page. Clients seek assistance from counselors to overcome the writer's block or narrative confusion that they experience as they move their careers into the next chapter. Once counselors understand the narrative impasse, they help clients to rewrite and retell their stories using interventions that clarify the career theme and extend the occupational plot.

Career construction counseling (Savickas, 2005, 2011) concentrates on stories because it views language as the efficient means for building careers out of complex social interactions. In those relationships, language and stories are construction tools for making meaning. As they tell

their stories, clients feel that they become more real. The more stories they tell, the more real they become. Storytelling highlights and crystallizes what clients think of themselves. Many clients laugh and cry while telling their stories because they see their life themes emerge in the space between client and counselor. It is important that counselors help client's understand the implications of what they have said in telling their stories. This means relating the themes to the problems posed at the beginning of counseling. It is also best to use a client's most dramatic metaphors and repeated words. At the same time, constructionist counseling expands the language that clients have available to make meaning out of experience. It offers clients the logical language of the Holland's (1997) RIASEC model as well as the dramatic language of stories and the symbolic language of poetry. Helping clients to enlarge their vocabulary of self increases their ability to story their experience and to understand and communicate who they are and what they seek.

The answers and direction that they seek from counseling emerge in their own stories. Career choices are made and problems solved not by counselors providing new information but by reorganizing what the client already knows. It is remarkable how many clients intuitively know what they must do to bridge the transition they face. A counselor's job is not to interpret the stories, but rather to help clients listen for the wisdom they author in telling how they conceptualize the self, choose preferred settings, commit to a script that they wish to live, and turn a passive preoccupation into an active occupation. Counselors help clients to listen their own stories in a particular way. Veteran counselors apply the advice of the novelist Eudora Welty (1983) – they help clients to *listen for* a story rather than *listen to* a story. Listening to a story means absorbing it by being passive and receptive. Listening for a story means actively

discerning it and collaboratively shaping it to make new meaning. Counseling for career construction does this by reconstructing a “life portrait” for a client’s consideration, then co-constructing with that client the next episode in her or his story, and finally encouraging the client to perform the new story through meaningful action in the real world.

A life portrait presents a succinct, focused, and sharply drawn career autobiography. It aims to give voice to the themes in client stories; access different meanings; introduce possibilities; and restart stalled initiatives. When career story-telling is approached as a transformational process, essential elements of the work life are distilled and then felt, explored, and integrated. Having clients practice their purpose informs their imagination with new ideas that stir intuition and reveal intentions. Rehearsing purpose promotes the expressive freedom to draw up a life plan that revitalizes the individual. It always involves considering what work can do for them as well as what work they might do. It does so by emphasizing mattering rather than congruence. Mattering confers meaning and substance on peoples’ lives by relating their stories to some pattern of higher meaning such as justice, knowledge, community, and beauty.

In addition to explicating the meaning and mattering of past experiences, career construction counseling activities forge links to the world that lies ahead by promoting intention and action. These activities increase the authority that clients’ have for their own lives. Although it may take only a few hours, composing a life portrait increases the quality of life, fosters agency, and improves the capacity to negotiate with other people. It assists clients to more fully inhabit their lives and become more complete as they sustain themselves and contribute to their communities.

### **Career Construction Interview**

To help clients compose a life portrait in words, career construction counseling prompts

self-reflection by asking five questions. Each question provides a different vantage point from which a client may view the self. The first perspective looks at identity fragments clients must organize as they do the narrative work involved in career construction. In responding to the question of “who did you admire when you were growing up?” clients describe the traits that they imitate and incorporate into their own identities. This enables them to articulate a self-conceptualization.

A second question seeks to place that self on a stage in some theater by inquiring about manifest interests. The goal is to determine the type of theater or work environment wherein clients envision engaging the self in activities. The question asks clients to name their favorite magazines and describe what attracts them to these publications. Alternatively, counselors might ask for three favorite television programs or even websites. Each of these media transports clients to a preferred place and shows them a particular social ecology. The places they prefer to go reveal their interests. Holland’s (1997) model of six types of work environments presents a vocabulary and classification system for organizing and understanding interest in the different work theaters.

Having considered self and stage, a third question inquires about a script for that self to perform on that stage. Counselors inquire about possible occupational scripts by asking clients to name their current favorite story, either in the form of a book or a movie. After clients name the book or movie, the counselor asks the client to briefly relate the story. In telling the story, clients usually are previewing their own possible futures. Typically, clients’ favorite stories portray clearly their central life problem and how they think they might be able to deal with it. In listening to the storyline, counselors concentrate on how the script unites the client’s self-concept and preferred stage in an occupational script that they might enact.

The fourth topic addressed in composing a life-portrait elicits clients' advice to themselves by asking for a favorite saying or motto. These aphorisms articulate the best advice that clients have for themselves right now. It is a form of auto-therapy in which clients repeatedly tell themselves what they must do to advance their story to a new chapter and in so doing become more of the self they wish to become. Clients possess an inner wisdom with which to guide themselves. I have become fascinated with how well clients know implicitly what they must do next. It is included in the life portrait not just to have clients speak their own truth but to have them hear and respect their own wisdom and examine how to apply it directly to their concerns about career construction and life design. It sounds simple, and it is. Nevertheless, it is profound. The process reinforces clients' authority in authoring their own lives. It builds confidence because clients realize that the answers to their questions are within them, not in some outside expert. The counselor acts not as expert but as a witness to validate and elaborate the client's intuitive suggestions and solutions.

Depending upon time and circumstance, a fifth question addresses clients' preoccupations. Counselors seek to learn clients' convictions about life by considering nuclear scenes in which clients encapsulate their life stories. Counselors may view early recollections as metaphors and parables that hold a person's central preoccupation. These scenes, in the form of early recollections, present to the counselor a client's perspective on life, the concerns etched by experience, and the ghosts that may still haunt the client. Having heard three early recollections narrated by a client, counselors then ask the client to review each story and compose a headline that captures its essence.

### **Composing a Life Portrait**

Having elicited stories of self-making, preferred work theaters, occupational scripts,

performance advice, and life premises, clients should be encouraged by the counselor to assemble these micro-narratives into a life portrait, that is, a higher-level macro-narrative that incorporates all the partial stories. The goal in arranging self, stage, script, advice, and preoccupation is to reveal something important. It is not a harvesting of images, but a poetic creativity that turns scattered stories and emotions into experiential vignettes that reflect the client's efforts to get a life. The goal is to articulate and elaborate a narrative thread in the scramble of clients' experiences and thereby reduce that complexity to something that clients can begin to understand.

Having composed a life portrait, clients may then contemplate it as they plan career scenarios and outline intended courses of occupational action. As a part of their scenarios, clients should indicate how they will use available affordances to build a career. The scenario must concretely state how they intend to make educational/vocational choices and formulate tentative commitments. Whether done orally in transformational dialogues or in life-writing exercises, the goal is the same—to prompt further self-making, career building, and life designing. The following case study explain how the life portrait is actually used in counseling.

### Case Study

The case of Elaine describes an application of the principles of career construction counseling and life designing. The case illustrates how counselors may use the results of a *Career Construction Interview* to help clients inhabit identity narratives that enable them to make educational and vocational choices and then enact suitable and viable roles.

### Meeting Elaine

Elaine's mother called me to arrange for career counseling with her daughter, stating that Elaine had already consulted two career counselors but they had not been very good. When I

asked what that meant, she explained that both counselors had failed to convince her daughter to major in biology and attend medical school. I agreed to counsel with Elaine only if Elaine herself made an appointment.

Elaine was a 20 year old, full-time college student who at our first meeting said that she could not decide on a major, although her mother urged her to declare pre-med. She lived at home and commuted to campus. Elaine guessed that she would major in pre-med and attend medical school yet she was unsure if this was right for her. She reported that she had been to her college counseling center yet felt more undecided after working with a counselor there. She wanted me to help her explore whether medicine was the right choice for her. She had just completed the fall semester of her sophomore year and in the spring must declare her major. She sometimes thinks engineering would be good for her, and she took an engineering class during the fall semester. She thought that maybe chemical engineering would be best, but civil engineering might be easier. She has requested information from another college where they have better integrated computers into their chemical engineering curriculum. She was attracted by computers and liked the idea that if she transferred to that college she could live in a student dormitory. I then asked her the five questions discussed previously. The notes I recorded appear next.

### **Career Construction Interview with Elaine**

*How can I be useful to you in constructing your career?*

I do not know why I can't choose a major. I need help in making a choice.

*Three role models:*

-Ann of Green Gables = spirit; temper (I hide mine); set goals and goes after them; does

what she wants; has integrity; has fun.

-Heroine in *Wrinkle in Time* = showdown against creatures trying to take over their minds. She thought of ways to stick together and fight them.

-Laura, *Little House on the Prairie* = wild ideas of things to do; compete, outdo each other; end up on the ground fighting.

*Magazines:*

*Vogue* = fashion; *Business Week* = the advertising campaigns; *Details* = men's clothing

*Favorite Television Show:*

*Laverne and Shirley* = they did things off the norm, but not getting into trouble

*Favorite Book:*

*The Search of Mary Kay Malloy* = it is the story of an Irish girl and her voyage to America by herself.

*Favorite Sayings:*

"I am curious about things" from *Curious George*

"Do it well."

*Three early recollections with headlines:*

#1 Little girl annoyed because she must sit still

Going to Disneyland with my grandparents and uncle and his girlfriend. I was in the back of the camper trying to sing and dance for my grandmother. She told me to sit down so I would not get hurt. I got on my uncle's girlfriend's nerves by trying to talk to her. Tried to talk but she did not think I should move around at the same time.

#2 Playful girl dreads speaking with relatives



I remember a family reunion at Grandma's (the other one). I was playing an old corn thing with my cousin. I did not know who most of the people were. Grandma made me stop playing and said I had to talk to the people because they knew who I was. Grandma said you kids behave.

### #3 Mischievous child has fun at first or dog plan fails

This family that my parents met in England came to visit. I teased their son. He made fun of the curlers in my hair. The boy was chasing me all over the yard. So I ran by my dog where the boy could not get me but he threw a stick and hit me in the eye. His mother and my mother took me in the bedroom and cleaned my eye.

Following the completion of the *Career Construction Interview*, I asked Elaine a few questions that occurred to me during that structured interview.

*How does it feel to be undecided?*

It feels okay now that I have accepted it. I am failing at what I should do (make a choice).

Floating in space, no direction, all dark.

*Of what does this feeling remind you?*

Being out of control.

*What does it mean to you to be out of control?*

I am afraid to choose the wrong thing. I could make a wrong choice. Then, I would not live up to other peoples' expectations.

### **Reconstructing Elaine's Stories**

Herein, it may be useful to demonstrate the interpretive routine used by career construction counselors. Similar to everyone else, Elaine's full story would require a novel. So

this demonstration will not be exhaustive. It highlights critical incidents and attitudes in Elaine's story to illustrate nine "tricks of the trade" in counseling for career construction. The basic goal for the case presentation is to demonstrate (a) the ways in which Elaine's small stories reveal how she *constructs* her career and (b) how a counselor might *deconstruct* and *reconstruct* these career micro-narratives into a macro-narrative that the client finds coherent, comprehensive, credible, and continuous. As client and counselor *co-construct* the next career chapter, these narrative qualities will clarify what is at stake, highlight decisions that must be made, emanate intentions, and foster choice certainty and commitment. **First**, I began to make sense of Elaine's stories by reviewing how she wanted to use the counseling experience. Similar to the first sentence in a novel, the response to how the counselor may be useful leans forward. Her goals frame my analysis of the stories and the counseling to follow. They provide the perspective from which to view the stories. In response to my introductory question "How can I be useful to you in constructing your career?" Elaine had said that she did not know why she cannot choose a major and she would like help in making a choice. This gives us two points of reference. She wants me to help her understand why she cannot choose as well as to move her closer to making a choice. So in reconstructing her career stories, I concentrate on her experiences decision making. I am particularly interested in how decision making relates to her life themes. Of course, I also note that in terms of career adaptability, she may benefit from increasing her sense of career control. Also, I will listen to learn if she further articulates her faint expression of interest in chemical engineering and computers. **Second**, I identified the verbs in her early recollections. The first verb in the first story is usually a particularly important form of movement for the client. For Elaine that verb was "going." To me going means that she wants to move, to be on the go, get

going, and to travel. I then examined the remaining stories for further evidence to support this idea. I noted the phrases "moving around" and "dancing" in the first recollection and I found further support in her favorite book, which tells the story of a girl's journey to another country. Other verbs in her early recollections stood out by their repetition. "Playing" and "singing" seem important to her. She is enthusiastic about life. Also "try" appears three times in the first recollection, suggesting that she is industrious and persistent in pursuing difficult goals yet non-committal about outcome expectations. "Talking" appears in the first two recollections, so she likes to communicate. And finally, in the first two recollections adult women tell her to sit down and stop playing. I began to feel the tension in her life between wanting to be on the go and being told to sit still. Of course there is much more in her stories yet identifying this tension seems fundamental. It is important to remember that these memories are not necessarily reasons for her behavior, she has re-membered them to reflect her current struggle. The past takes lessons from the present, reshaping itself to fit current needs. This is why career stories almost always directly express the central issue currently confronting a client. From the many available stories, clients tell those that they themselves need to hear. The counselor's job is to make the client consider the stories in light of present circumstances.

**Third,** I considered the headlines Elaine had written for her three recollections. The headlines are rhetorical compressions that express the gist of each story. From Elaine's perspective, she is a "little girl" who is annoyed because powerful others stop her from enthusiastically pursuing her dreams. They want her to stay put where they place her and she dreads talking to them about her needs. She knows that she can be mischievous and irritate them, yet understands that this negative plan will fail in the long run. It is worthwhile to read these plot

lines in two ways. On the one hand, they reveal more about the life theme that will shape her career. On the other hand, they indicate in the here-and-now the problem she wants to address in counseling and what she expects from her counselor. She wants a counselor to encourage her movement and her gusto for life, teach her to speak up for herself, and devise a plan that will not fail.

*Fourth*, I attended to the character that Elaine had constructed for her self. How Elaine described her role models revealed core elements in her self-making and articulated how she wishes to act in the world. Elaine's key figures model spirit, enthusiasm, playfulness, goals, competitiveness, persistence, temper, fighting wrong-headed authority, and enlisting compatriots in these battles. These qualities find expression in her other stories. She is not frightened by wild ideas and doing things off the norm as long as they are fun and do not get her into trouble.

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*Fifth*, I compared what I have learned from steps three (problem) and four (solution). I wanted to understand how Elaine was attempting to solve her problems in constructing a career and how occupations can help her actively master the problems she faces. To do this, I compared the first early recollection to her role models. The early recollections portray the pain and problem while the role models propose a solution. In Elaine's case, the first story is about a playful girl being told to sit still and do as she is told. This, of course, resonates to her current dilemma--sitting still as her mother tells her to major in pre-med. The sitting still can be her metaphor for indecision. To see the plan she has in mind, I reviewed who she has chosen as models for self-construction. As the architect of her own character, she has selected them as blueprints because they have solved the problems she herself now faces. Elaine has incorporated characteristic strivings from these key figures into her own character. How she described them

reveals core elements in her self-concept and articulates her psychosocial identity. More than that, the descriptions serve as goals she has set for herself. In Elaine's stories, the key figures model spirit and persistence in fighting wrong-headed authority—just what is needed by a young woman being told to sit still.

**Sixth**, I profiled her career adaptability along the four dimensions conceptualized by career construction theory: (a) *concern* about the transition being encountered and awareness of what must be done, (b) a sense of *control* over and conscientiousness regarding the tasks to be performed, (c) *curiosity* about possibilities and initiative in job search activities, and (d) *confidence* in coping with the transition process. After reviewing the coping strategies in her stories, I concluded that she is deeply concerned about the future, shows curiosity about it, and could use a little more confidence in her ability to make it happen-- but this is due more to perfectionistic tendencies than to a lack of self-esteem. The major deficiency in the profile, of course, is the absence of career control. Indecision is her "try" at wrestling her mind away from powerful others who want to make it up for her. Ownership of her career is at stake, and she is now getting ready to fight for it. She just needs a plan and some encouragement. I will start by trying to help Elaine view her indecision as a strength, not a weakness. It is her way of fighting powerful creatures who are trying to control her career.

**Seventh**, I appraised Elaine's vocational preferences by viewing her manifest interests through the lens of Holland's RIASEC hexagon. She showed interest in fashion, clothing design, and advertising campaigns. She likes to do things off the norm without getting into trouble. Influencing and creating seemed to be her two strongest interests. Individuals with this pairing usually show potential for creative leadership and innovative projects yet do not fit easily into

occupational niches. They also enjoy travel, seek adventure, and display uniqueness. They seem more comfortable being second in command or on a team because the first in command usually combines influencing skills with more conventional interests. To brainstorm possible occupations, I went to the O\*NET site on the worldwide web (<http://www.onetonline.org>) and entered “enterprising artistic.” The results were: Document Management Specialists, Computer Programmer, Chief Executive, Software Developer, Applications, Computer and Information Systems Manager, Computer Systems Analyst, Software Developers, Systems Software, Network and Computer Systems Administrators, Computer Network Architects, Computer Systems Engineer/Architect, Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products, Risk Management Specialist, Database Architect, and Art Director.

*Eighth*, I turned to Elaine’s current favored script which tells of a young girl who travels the country in search of herself. Elaine is living this script in that she must search for herself. She has not yet crystallized an identity; she is fighting off her mother’s attempt to confer on her the vocational identity of a physician.

*Ninth*, I read Elaine’s advice to herself in context of the life portrait that had been emerging. Her advice to herself is to be curious and do it right. Her vocational indecisiveness (rather than indecision) seems rooted in identity confusion. Career counseling probably should concentrate on identity interventions and occupational exploration-in-breadth rather than exploration-in-depth and committing to a specific major.

### **Life Portraiture**

Having completed my nine-step interpretive routine, I then summarize my conclusions and prepare to meet the client by doing composing a life portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) that the client and I will edit together. In composing a life portrait, I aim for an honest

portrayal of a client's life as a work in progress, a life that is simultaneously predetermined and unpredictable. The portrait is not the same as a book of life; rather than facts, it presents narrative truth and highlights the emotions that glue the facts together. It includes tentative answers to implicit questions such as "Who am I?" "What is my quest?" and "How can I grow and flourish?" I emphasize and repeat the life theme, affirming its significance and validity, and use it to unite the meaning of the separate career stories. This emphasis furthers client individuation by integrating the parts and forces that constitute her or him. I do this by imposing narrative structure to reconstruct a view of the self that unites contradictory views, baffling behaviors, and inconsistent stories. Most of all I illuminate the secret that makes the client's life whole. If nothing else, I want the portrait to articulate the controlling idea that states a ruling passion in the client's life. By clarifying what is at stake and the choices to be made, the life portrait will enhance the client's ability to decide

I typically begin a second session by reviewing the client's response to my opening inquiry regarding how counseling might be useful to him or her. Then I present the life portrait. I always present the portrait in a way that highlights its developmental trajectory, especially the movement from symptom to strength-- from tension to intention-- so that clients actually feel their own movement from passive suffering to active mastery. In so doing, I act as a story teller in focusing on dramatic movements, always talking about where the client is headed and asserting the client's agency in directing this movement. Occasionally, I pause to act more like a poet in bringing important details into sharp focus by highlighting vivid expressions of the self in a narrative moment. This is analogous to pausing the movie of the client's life to study a single frame or photograph. These pauses in the action are used to reconstruct old meanings in a way

that creates new meanings and opens new avenues of movement. I always restate the obvious in the life portrait, and in candid language, because what is not acknowledged grows bigger than it needs to be.

As I present a portrait to the client I remain curious, never certain. Several times I ask the client if I understand things accurately by inquiring, “What am I missing?” The portrait must be presented as a tentative sketch, not the final truth. It gets its validity from organizing the particulars of a life into an internally consistent and personally meaningful story. So in the end, the truth of my portrait of a client is arbitrated by its utility to that client.

### **Elaine’s Life Portrait**

For Elaine, the focus of the portrayal is not on an occupational choice but on self-determination. Elaine has not yet crystallized her vocational identity because she remains caught in a “showdown against creatures trying to take over” her career. We can see that she has emerging interest in computers and chemical engineering, and Elaine senses this herself. The pertinent issue is who own her career, her mother or herself. The focal point of counseling will be on increasing her sense of autonomy and skills in assertiveness. Growing in awareness that she is responsible for choosing her career and designing in life --in collaboration with her family not in competition with them—Elaine will be able to explore her interests in engineering and computers to determine how well they fit her values and aspirations. Counseling will not ignore her need to declare an academic major, it will address this need in context of more pressing issues.

With Elaine, I started our second meeting by asking her if she had any additional thoughts about her responses during the *Career Construction Interview* or if there were any



things she wished to add or clarify. Although she did not, many clients do because they continue to think about the questions and conversation in the hours following the first session. I then reminded Elaine of what she had said in response to my inquiry about how counseling could be useful to her. Elaine had said that she did not know why she cannot choose a major and she would like help in making a choice. She also had mentioned that she wanted to discuss whether medicine would be a good field for her. This gives us three points of reference from which to view her life portrait: why she cannot choose (career adaptability), how good a fit is medicine (vocational interests), and how to move toward making a choice (favorite story and advice to self).

I then depicted her life theme as fighting powerful creatures who are trying to steal her mind, or in this particular instance her career. She is rebelling by sitting still and refusing to decide in their favor while she marshals personal resources and social support to make her own choice. I paused to get her reaction and revisions. We explored her feelings about the portrait, because affect helps to create meaning. We also looked at her strengths, especially the personal characteristics of which she was most proud. We then discussed how the problems she currently faced were really the best solutions that she could come up with so far. For example, I helped Elaine to reconstruct her indecision from being a problem to it being the best solution she has found so far for trying to fight off the creatures who are stealing her career by making her sit still for what they want. In this way, I attempted to help her use language, especially her own favorite metaphors and verbs, as a means of controlling the situation and increasing feelings of agency.

Having thus addressed Elaine's first concern-- understanding why she cannot make a decision regarding her academic major-- we moved to her second question--how well a career in

medicine would suit her. I considered her manifest interests and how she might wish to position herself in society. We discussed her interests in being a team leader, manager, or supervisor who is independent. I also highlighted her interest in designing things and expressing creativity. I commented that if she were to become a physician, she would probably be attracted to a specialty such as plastic surgery or dermatology because they both include creative design work. We also talked about exploring majors in chemical engineering (because she had initially mentioned it), computer science (because she had written for information about computer majors), advertising, marketing, and business management. We briefly discussed the list of occupations from the O\*NET. We also discussed the importance of her including being on the move, traveling, and having adventures as she thinks of possible selves and future scenarios. Most of all, we discussed discovering ways in which she could flourish and places where self-definition and self-determination would be possible.

The discussion of autonomy led naturally to her third question-- how to move forward in choosing a major. We discussed ways forward from where she now sits, including alternative resolutions and possible selves. Her indecision is not a weakness, it reflects a potential strength that must blossom, in her case probably into a life-long decisiveness and talent for solving problems. That life must be full of movement, not sitting. I explained that development arises from activity and overcoming difficulties met in the world. We then engaged in a forward-looking conversation about self-construction activities that might make her feel more whole and move her closer to being the person she wanted to be. We conversed about her desire to assert more control over her life and to choose her own major. In preparation for so doing, we talked about possible growth experiences such as working a summer job away from home, living in a

college dormitory, taking a workshop on assertiveness, and meeting with a counselor to discuss family issues. She was encouraged by our conversation and actually felt that looking back over her life had given her the ability to move forward and the resolve to do so. We agreed to talk on the phone in the middle of the next semester and meet again during the summer.

When she visited again, the next summer, Elaine reported that she had taken a continuing education course in assertiveness, worked with a college counselor for five sessions to improve her relationship with her mother and reduce her perfectionism, lived away from home while working a summer job as a ticket-taker at an amusement park, and completed elective courses in computer science and chemical engineering. She was leaning toward declaring a major in computer science yet still wondered if chemical engineering would be a better fit for her.

I next saw Elaine after she graduated with a major in chemical engineering and a minor in computer science. She told me how much she had enjoyed her courses but detested the sexism exhibited by many of her instructors. To combat their bias, she had organized a club for females who were majoring in engineering. She was proud of what they had achieved in combating sexism. She was even more proud of the occupational position that she had recently secured. In two weeks she would begin a job as a computer systems analyst for a large chemical company. This position required traveling with a team of colleagues to regional branches throughout the United States where she would solve their computer problems. Furthermore, Elaine told the counselor that she and her mother were now friendly and that her mother was proud of her accomplishments and pleased with her prospects. Elaine looked forward to becoming a woman on the go, one encouraged by a mother who tells her not to sit still. She glowed as she told me how she had used the things that we had talked about to help her roommates and friends make

career choices. Six years later, after obtaining an M.S. in chemical engineering consulting, she was working as a consultant in chemical product design. For live demonstrations of career construction counseling view two DVDs-- *Career Counseling* (Savickas, 2006) and *Career Counseling Over Time* (Savickas, 2009)

### **Conclusion**

Counselors' predictions about how Elaine's career progressed should not be used to evaluate a counselor's competence. Whether a counselor's initial "guesses" about the next chapter in Elaine's career story were right or wrong should never be at issue. What is important is that Elaine's counselor should be "useful" to her, not "right." The counselor would have been useful if she or he helped to Elaine understand her career stories, know her vocational personality and preferred work environments, grow in career control, and envision and explore possible selves and future scenarios. Clients with career issues need counselors who help them author their lives, not fortune tellers who make predictions.

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