



Critical moments in career construction counseling

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ABSTRACT

An important research need concerns identifying and describing factors that promote reflexivity and change in life-design career interventions. Career construction counseling, a primary life-design intervention, uses narrative methods in an interpersonal process of helping people design a work life through reflexive action. Using Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR), the present study examined what prompts reflexivity and change in career construction counseling. A single case analysis method involving a 24-year old Caucasian woman examined one client's experience of processes that prompted change and reflection about her current career transition. Post-counseling IPR with the client of her videotaped career construction counseling session indicated five major themes: (a) role models prompt identity reflection, (b) early recollections foster cohesion, (c) follow-up questions add depth to the story, (d) counselor as audience provides clarity and validation, and (e) career construction interview questions illuminate perspective and need for action. Results support prior research indicating the usefulness of career construction counseling for promoting reflexive action in life design.

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1. Introduction

Career construction counseling (Savickas, 2011, 2015) implements life design as a new paradigm for 21st-century career intervention (Savickas, 2012; Savickas et al., 2009). Life design amplifies the vocational guidance (Holland, 1997; Parsons, 1909) and career development (Super, 1990) paradigms of 20th-century career science and practice. It does so by emphasizing human diversity, uniqueness, and intentionality in work and career to make a life of personal meaning and social consequence (Savickas et al., 2009). Since the original statement of this new paradigm, need remains for research “to identify and describe the processes underlying life-designing interventions” (Savickas et al., p. 248). Toward this end, we used Interpersonal Process Recall (Kagan, 1980) in the present study to examine a single episode of career construction counseling between a client and counselor. Our goal was to determine factors during career construction counseling that promote reflexivity and change in the life-design career intervention process.

1.1. Career construction theory

Career construction comprises both a theory of vocational behavior (Savickas, 2002, 2013) and a system of career counseling (Savickas, 2011, 2015). With social constructionism as its base, career construction theory advances the psychologies of occupations (Holland, 1997), careers (Super, 1990), and life design (Savickas et al., 2009). In so doing, it incorporates and builds upon

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their respective traditions of person-environment fit emphasizing traits, lifespan development emphasizing developmental tasks, and narrative emphasizing life themes to comprehend career as a story. This permits viewing individuals as, respectively, social actors who display dispositions that fit corresponding types of work environments, motivated agents who develop readiness to fit work into life, and autobiographical authors who reflexively form themselves and their careers through self-defining narratives (Savickas, 2011, 2013). Career construction theory translates to practice in the form of a counseling model and methods for helping people construct their careers.

1.2. Career construction counseling

Career construction counseling entails an interpersonal process of helping people author career stories that connect their self-concepts to work roles, fit work into life, and make meaning through narratives about self and work. Using narrative methods, career construction counseling begins with a career construction interview (CCI; Savickas, 2011). The CCI contains a sequence of questions designed to prompt telling of the life story in a series of small, micro stories. From the telling of the life story, client and counselor co-construct a life portrait that entails an autobiographical narrative about the client's central life theme. In co-constructing a life portrait, the counselor aims to assist the client to relate the life theme to a career problem or transition currently faced. Counselor and client then endeavor to use the life portrait to prompt the client to move intentionally toward enacting self in a life-career.

The three career construction counseling processes of the CCI, life portraiture, and action aim to promote life-design counseling goals of increased narratability, adaptability, intentionality, and reflexivity. Narratability means the capacity to coherently tell one's own life story. Adaptability means the capacity to make changes in self and situation. Intentionality means the capacity to purposefully shape a personal life-career story that imposes meaning on vocational behavior. Thinking about their answers to the CCI questions promotes clients' reflexivity. Reflexivity means contemplative awareness and understanding about one's life and career development.

1.2.1. Career construction interview

As seen in Table 1, the CCI comprises six questions about goals, self, stage, script, solution, and perspective (Savickas, 2011, 2013, 2015). Setting the scene for the current act in the client's life-career story, the CCI begins with the question "How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?". Answers to this question indicate the client's counseling goals and current problem and solution they already have in mind for it.

To indicate the reputation of the client as lead actor in their own story, the second question asks "Who did you admire when you were growing up? Tell me about her or him.". As clients describe three role models they describe themselves in terms of who they are and wish to become, their central life goal, and solutions to their main life problem. The third question asks "What are your favorite magazines, TV shows, or web sites? What do you like about them?". Manifest interests reflected in these vicarious environments indicate potential educational and occupational settings where the client as an agent, or manager of their own career story wants to enact their self-concept.

Linking self as actor to setting as agent, the fourth question asks: "What is your current favorite book or movie? Tell me the story.". The story is chosen because it provides perspective on the current problem and contains a plot resembling the client's own principal problem, preoccupation, or pain. The script connects the client's self-concept and preferred work environments into a life plan that the client can author. To elicit self-advice, the fifth question asks: "Tell me your favorite saying or motto.". The answer indicates the best inner wisdom and guidance the client has for dealing with life's problems.

Revealing the client's perspective on the current problem and central preoccupation, the final question asks: "What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recall happening to you when you were three to six years old, or as early as you can remember.". The counselor prompts the client to tell three early childhood memories that the person recalls in the present moment because they place the current transition problem in the context of central life themes and plots that structure the character arc of the person's life. As the client relates self-defining responses to the CCI questions, the counselor listens closely, asks follow-up questions, and makes reflective statements to clarify meaning. Counselor and client then use the client's responses to all six CCI questions to co-construct a life-career portrait.

Table 1

Career construction interview content.

Question	Purpose	Part
1. How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?	Counseling goals set the scene	Act
2. Who did you admire when you were growing up? Tell me about him or her.	Reputation, character traits portray the self	Actor
3. What are your favorite magazines, TV shows, or web sites? What do you like about them?	Manifest interests indicate preferred work stages	Agent
4. What is your current favorite story from a book or movie? Tell me the story.	Storyline provides a script for linking self to setting	Author
5. Tell me your favorite saying or motto.	Self-advice offers a solution	Advice
6. What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recall happening to you when you were around three to six years old, or as early as you can remember.	Early memories give perspective on current problem	Arc

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