ONLINE CAREER CONSTRUCTION FOR A TRAUMA SURVIVOR WITH CAREER CHOICE AMBIVALENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the online administration of career construction counselling for a trauma survivor who sought help in resolving her career-choice ambivalence (uncertainty). The participant was purposively selected from a group of people attending a workshop on career construction counselling. An intrinsic, descriptive, exploratory intervention case study based on career construction counselling (involving administering the Career Construction Interview (CCI) to elicit the participant's micro-narratives qualitatively) was used to generate data and adapted thematic data analysis incorporating the analytic style proposed by Savickas was used to analyse the data reflexively. The intervention shed light on the participant's conscious knowledge about herself and on her subconsciously regulated views on her preferred future career choices. The findings confirmed the value of career construction counselling in promoting the participant's psychological self as an autobiographical author especially. They also underlined the importance of timely intervention for trauma survivors in pre-empting the occurrence of unmastered developmental tasks and repetition of trauma. Future research should involve diverse participants in individual as well as group contexts. Equally important is contextualising the intervention discussed here to meet the distinctive diversity needs of participants in individual and group contexts.

Keywords: trauma, career choice ambivalence, career construction counselling, career construction interview, career interest profile, connecting conscious knowledge with subconscious insight

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity and uncertainty about the future of work have been aggravated by recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Work 4.0, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Included in this mix are the deteriorating work and career prospects of young people in particular. The pandemic has given rise to new career counselling challenges and heightened the career concerns of people (such as feeling that they have enrolled in "inappropriate" fields of study, leaving them frustrated and unsure about what to study). This article argues that the trauma arising from job

losses and a bleak work future calls for an innovative response from career counselling theorists, practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers. Career counselling needs to respond to change by regularly re-imagining, innovating, and updating existing theory and practice to ensure that it remains relevant and useful (Gati, Ryzhik, and Vertsberger 2013; Kelly and Lee 2002; Maree 2016).

CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES

Issues such as changing schools, dropping some subjects in favour of other subjects, struggling to choose appropriate fields of study and careers, and switching from one field of study to another are common in people's academic lives. According to Gati and Kulcsár (2021) and Kulcsár, Dobrean, and Gati (2020), people's career choice-related decisions are influenced by four factors in particular. These are (i) having to compromise between what careers they want and what careers others want for them, (ii) satisficing with regard to career choice, (iii) needing to manage career indecision, and (iv) acknowledging the interplay between people's conscious and subconscious career decision-making courses of action.

Gati and Asher (2001) together with Kelly and Lee (2002) have grouped decision-making difficulties into the five categories listed below. Many career counsellors use these categories to help them (i) understand (and describe) and (ii) plan interventions to deal with the unique challenges different people face. The categories are:

i. insufficient general information about career choices;
ii. unsatisfactory sense of career and self-identity;
iii. underdeveloped ability to decide on and choose careers and associated fields of study;
iv. inordinate angst or concern regarding the choice of a career; and
v. dissonance between people's opinions regarding career choices and those of significant others (Gati and Asher 2001; Kelly and Lee 2002).

Gati and Asher (2001) also distinguish between two categories of career choice-making challenges, namely (i) career indecision and (ii) career indecisiveness. Career indecision is considered a "normal" phenomenon that forms part of a person's development in making career decisions. Career indecisiveness on the other hand is a long-lasting condition linked to personality challenges (Levin et al. 2020; Saka, Gati, and Kelly 2008; Udayar et al. 2020). Resolving these two types of career decision-making challenges calls for different interventions.

In the intervention discussed here, I drew on counselling for career construction (Savickas

2019) to help the participant resolve her idiosyncratic manifestation of career choice ambivalence. Given the unique nature of her "presenting problem", no other theory and associated approach could sufficiently explain her reason for seeking career counselling. The theoretical and conceptual framework I used to gather and interpret data was self- and career construction, which also involved trauma and psychosocial development theories. I also drew briefly on self-construction theory (SCT) (Guichard 2009) as I believe career construction counselling contains an element of self-construction. Interested readers are referred to the work of, for instance, Guichard (2009), Hartung (2019), Maree (2013; 2022a), and Savickas (2019) for more information on the subject.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Career Construction Theory (CCT)

Career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas 2019; 2021) holds that people should be helped to narrate or recount (and subsequently draw on) their multiple career-life stories to help them choose and enact careers that will help them "make meaning" through their work. Eliciting and integrating their micro-stories can help career counsellors augment people's internal and external dialogues and assist them to connect what they know about themselves consciously (knowledge that is revealed by their responses to standardised tests) with the insight they are aware of only subconsciously (revealed by "storied" questions that relate to their earliest and also their later recollections) (Savickas 2019; Freud 1964). CCT holds also that choosing and enacting appropriate careers is not mere happenstance (Krumboltz 2009). Rather, making successful career decisions is a result of people adapting to change and responding to life experiences (Arastaman 2019). Career counselling as discussed here underscores (i) the need to establish people's personality traits, (ii) the importance of adapting and developing these traits, and (iii) the value of uncovering people's key life themes (Hartung 2011). Life themes relate to trauma experienced by people earlier in their lives (and at work) and also to unmastered developmental tasks. Resolving such trauma and tasks is needed to help people deal successfully with occupational and personal transitions in today's ever-changing workplace.

On the basis of "ordinary everyday" conversation, CCT integrates and blends three categories of experiences into constantly evolving key career-life themes. These three categories are, first, personal connotations associated with past recollections; second, current experiences; and third, future aims and intentions. CCT holds the view that reflecting on people's "subjective careers" advances critical self-reflection and facilitates meta-communication. In the process, people's narrative identities are clarified. Self-reflection, reflexivity, and autobiographicity are

thus enacted through work-related behaviour (Savickas 2015a; 2015b) to promote coherence and continuity in their career-life stories (Cardoso, Savickas, and Gonçalves 2019).

The impact of trauma on people's lives

Everyone experiences challenges or problems in their childhood – some of which can be described as "traumatic". Requesting people to respond to questions about their childhood experiences and earliest recollections, things that they have "suffered" and that they do not want others to suffer, and problems experienced in their youth often uncovers the pain and trauma that was suffered. The responses may shed light on unmastered developmental assignments in the early years of their lives. Erikson (1968) maintains that people have to navigate eight life stages that unfold naturally during their development. These stages commence in infancy and culminate in late adulthood (Erikson 1994; Sprouts 2017).

Factors such as education, the environment, cultural upbringing, and rearing influence people's navigation of Erikson's eight developmental stages. Individuals have to deal with and master an array of challenges in consecutive stages. Helping them actively master any pain they have suffered passively as well as any previously unmastered assignments can promote their healing. This is a therapeutic process that helps people convert pain into hope and challenges into solutions and social contributions (Savickas 2019). Such people then often experience a strong desire to choose a career that can empower them to help downtrodden others stand up for themselves and acquire self-regulating behaviour.

Identity formation and the three layers of the personality

Authors such as McAdams (2001) and Savickas (2019) describe identity formation as a lifelong process of self-construction. Identity formation (defined as "the sense of self-derived from one's development of an occupational career" by Stringer, Kerpelman, and Skorikov (2011, 158)) is regarded as a central developmental task by Erikson (1968) too. Identity formation is particularly important during the two stages when people normally choose careers and start working (adolescence) and when they transition from adolescence to early adulthood. Erikson (1968) believes the inability to choose and enact a successful career can negatively influence people's sense of self and career identity. Such individuals then often struggle to navigate career transitions successfully.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Many authors including Hartung (2015) and Niles and Bowlsbey (2017) emphasise the importance of career development in the childhood years. This article examines how trauma

experienced in childhood and unresolved developmental tasks can translate into central life themes and how such trauma can be uncovered and resolved. Helping people deal with trauma experienced during their early childhood has received little attention in career counselling. It has been regarded as something that should be dealt with only by, for instance, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Yet there is no denying that unresolved trauma in the early years should be regarded as an unmastered early developmental task. This trauma often recurs repeatedly in later life, seriously impacting people's self- and career construction. Freud (1964) and Savickas (2019) maintain that failure to master unmastered trauma or developmental tasks is psychologically unhealthy.

The research reported here is a single-case study that illuminates the idiosyncratic "story" of a woman who experienced major trauma during childhood. I believe that the intervention explicated here can be implemented effectively with others who have experienced similar trauma.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study discussed here attempted to answer the following questions.

a.   What was the influence of the intervention on the participant's sense of career identity?
b.   What was the influence of the intervention on the participant's career choice ambivalence?

METHOD

Participant and context

Convenience and random sampling were used to select a 24-year-old participant, Antoinette (pseudonym), an English-speaking master's degree student in counselling psychology. Antionette had to enact the role of a counsellee during a live demonstration of counselling for career construction. The live demonstration formed part of a narrative or storied career counselling workshop in 2020. All the participants were invited to write their names on small pieces of paper and to put the pieces of paper into a small box, which was then shuffled and one piece of paper drawn from the box randomly to facilitate random sampling. After the demonstration, I invited three other participants to say what the research participant's story had meant to them. The ethical aspects of the demonstration were strongly emphasised, for example, that nothing should be said about the demonstration outside the course venue.

Mode of inquiry

I based the research on a qualitative (interpretivist) paradigm and implemented an explorative,

descriptive, intrinsic, intervention single-case study design (Yin 1984).

Procedure: Data-gathering methods

Data-gathering sources

First, I administered the Career Interest Profile (CIP, Version 6) (Maree 2017) to the group of participants. This instrument elicits career-life story data qualitatively. Premised on career construction theory (Savickas 2015a), career-style assessment (Adler 1958), storied career counselling theory (Cochran 1997), and psychosocial development theory (Erikson 1968), CIP questions elicit responses that shed light on developmental, psychodynamic (storied), and differential aspects of assessees' career-lives. (Part 2 of the CIP has a small quantitative element, which has demonstrated good test-retest reliability, content validity, and criterion-related validity (Maree 2008)). The CIP can be used in groups and individually (with or without adjunct questionnaires). All questions in the CIP are purposefully structured, beginning with differential and development phase-related questions and gradually moving to "storied" questions. A qualitative consistency index is obtained by rephrasing and repeating a small number of questions. Responses are then used to facilitate reflection and reflexivity and enhance assessees' narratability and autobiographicity, culminating in the illumination, elucidation, and reconstruction and co-construction of assessees' career-life stories (Maree2020; 2021).

Second, I administered the Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas 2019) to Antoinette to elicit her career-life story and to facilitate writing her life portrait.

(The entire intervention was conducted online.)

Intervention procedure

As recommended by Cardoso et al. (2019) and Savickas (2019), the intervention was conducted in three phases. In phase 1 (the elicitation of the career-life story phase), Antoinette's presenting career counselling "problem" (see her responses to questions in the CCI) was clarified, followed by an exploration of her micro-narratives about her role models, interests, and the cultural scripts that shaped her life. During phase 2 (the authorisation phase, which occurred the next day and lasted 90 minutes), she and I identified her key life themes. We jointly reconstructed her micro-narratives into a macro-narrative that reflected her existing career-life story, including her advice to herself regarding her presenting problem. Antoinette was given ample opportunity to reflect on her career story while co-crafting her life portrait to clarify matters that were unclear or misunderstood and to "de-authorise" any suggested interpretations of her responses offered by me. Care was taken to ensure that her career-life narrative reflected her

views, not mine, to allow her to listen to her own advice. This enabled Antoinette with my help to connect her conscious knowledge about herself with her subconscious insights ("advice" to herself) and thus "advise" herself. Jointly with me, Antoinette advised herself on how she could deal with her career choice ambivalence. Phase 3 occurred the following day and lasted 60 minutes. This phase comprised co-construction of career plans and strategies to understand Antoinette's reason for seeking career counselling and to facilitate active movement forward. During this phase, Antoinette and I together conceptualised and planned action steps to help her follow her inner advice to herself regarding the way forward. We scrutinised her reason for consulting me, examined the contours of her career-life story, connected the emerging dots, deliberated on possible action steps and strategies, and concluded by outlining a "road map" to plot the way forward. We contemplated Antoinette's personal development (growth), discussed areas for further development, and reflected on various options for her future.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Thematic analysis

I audio-typed Antoinette's responses and comments (the "reflective conversations" or dialogues between the two of us). All these conversations were transcribed verbatim. I subsequently drew on an adapted version of thematic data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019; 2021) to identify themes and subthemes from the data obtained from the open-ended questions of the CCI and the CIP. All findings were carefully checked against the original data for purposes of verification.

I followed a reflexive approach to data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019; 2021) and used consensual qualitative research (CQR) to ensure that we arrived at consensus decisions (Hill et al. 2005). The following actions were carried out to enhance data analysis (Savickas 2019):

a.   I asked Antoinette to explain what her answers to particular questions, for example, her seven areas for development, meant to her.
b.   Repeated words, phrases, and bodily expressions were carefully recorded (to the extent that noting physical responses was possible during our virtual meeting).
c.   I read Antoinette's words, phrases, and expressions back to her and asked her to explain and clarify their meaning. She was also asked to say certain words and phrases out loud to promote validation of her story and enhance her experience of the intervention as "authentic".
d.   Antoinette and I used her answers to the earliest recollections question and CIP questions

about the biggest challenges she had experienced in her childhood to identify her key life themes. These themes were then related to possible fields of study (co-construction) and to how she could use her career to enact these themes and "heal" others.

Analysing the CCI

I analysed Antoinette's responses to the CCI questions following Savickas' (2019) and Hartung's (2011) guidelines.

Creating a life portrait

Antoinette and I implemented the eight steps proposed by Savickas (2019) to create her life portrait.

Step 1: We considered her answers to the first CCI question.
Step 2: We drew on her earliest recollections to uncover her key life themes (preoccupations).
Step 3: We reflected on her role models to help us determine what they represented to her.
Step 4: We studied her favourite magazine, TV programme, app, and website to shed light on the environments that best suited her preferred lifestyle.
Step 5: We examined her favourite story to establish whether it included a character who had faced a similar problem and how that character had solved the problem.
Step 6: We considered her favourite quotations to determine how she could "heal" herself and others.
Step 7: We considered appropriate career options.
Step 8: We returned to her initial reason for seeking career counselling.

Information gathered using the CIP was drawn on to facilitate the writing of Antoinette's life portrait. Here, I was following the advice of Savickas (2016, n.p.) to counsellors to use his strategy or "[devise and] use your own but you need to have some way to listen for valid stories; not veracity" (Savickas 2016, n.p.).

Rigour of the study

I facilitated crystallisation by asking a broad array of qualitative questions to enhance the validity of the research (Janesick 2000; Richardson 2000), and triangulating the CCI outcomes with outcomes obtained from the CIP improved the trustworthiness of the research. I also conducted peer debriefing, encouraged participant review throughout the intervention, provided feedback at all stages, endeavoured to avoid misunderstanding or confusion, and asked

Antoinette to verify (authorise) the analyses and interpretations of all the conversations I held with her. Outcomes were reported verbatim and data were not used selectively. Lastly, the outcomes were checked by an experienced researcher to promote intercoder and intercoding reliability (MacPhail et al. 2015; O'Connor and Joffe 2020).

Role of the researcher

For the purposes of the study, I acted as a researcher-counsellor and as a sounding board (confidante).

Ethical considerations

I obtained Antoinette's consent to report the findings, and I adhered to "standard" ethical guidelines regarding voluntary participation, privacy, anonymity, and protection from harm.

OUTCOMES

Responses to questions in the CCI

In response to the first question, "How can I be useful to you?", Antoinette replied:

> "I think you could be valuable to me in terms of exploring possible areas in psychology that I might prefer. I am sure that I want to work as a psychologist. I thought it was trauma that I wanted to specialise in, but I am not sure if that is the case any longer. Clarity in terms of where to complete my internship next year. What would I be attracted to? A community facility? A hospital? Focusing on traumatic experiences? People in pain? Custody cases? Adjustment issues? Bullying at school? Learning issues? Developmental challenges? I realise that the latter relates more to educational-psychological issues. I want to work in the helping profession as a psychologist, but the word 'psychologist' is a very broad term; we live in a very big world, and I would like to narrow my options down a bit."

Role models

In two instances, Antoinette listed family members as role models. As such, they were regarded as "guiding lines" (Savickas 2019).

> "Harry Potter." [Looks up and smiles] "I was intrigued by the mysteriousness, the fantasy world that, as a child, I could escape into. Mom used to read the books to me when I was little. Before I went to see the movie, she and I would fantasise together like in a fairy tale story, a fairy world. The three main characters were my favourite role models. They were best friends: Harry, Hermione, and Ron. Harry was the main survivor when an evil guy killed his parents and left a scar (Z) on his forehead. Hermione rejected Harry in favour of Ron (a strapping young man). However, she realised later on that Harry was the man she loved. She would regret having rejected him for the rest of her life."

"My grandmother (dad's mother). She was and still is a role model for me for many reasons. These include her positivity, energy, humour, always having fun, and a way of making things lighter." [Looks down] "I was probably too young and it would have been a little too young to appreciate her appropriately." [Looks down again, keeps her head down].

"My dad." [Looks up, her face lights up] "His unconditional love, acceptance, passion, and doing whatever he did to the fullest. If he made mistakes, he learned from his mistakes. Dad and I are big fans of Victor Frankl. He based his theories on real people; he showed that the chances of surviving of people with a sense of meaning and purpose are much higher than the chances of those without a sense of meaning and purpose. His words, 'You don't have control over your circumstances but you do have control over your attitude.' I live by that quote."

Favourite magazine, television show, and website

[Looks up] "Instagram. It's such a broad platform. You can share your story with and share in the stories of others. It is a universal platform that connects you with people worldwide, such as in China. Using this medium, one can fill oneself with unrealistic expectations to change your profile. I often find myself comparing myself to other people, but I have learned that doing that can be an unrealistic way of seeing things – and unnecessary."

Favourite book or movie

"Torey Haden writes books such as 'One child' on the experiences of emotionally scarred children; children that suffer from emotional disturbances. This book is about an emotionally damaged four-year-old child Torey had the opportunity to work with. They make progress but also suffer setbacks. The child overcomes these setbacks and develops into a healthy little girl. Torey shows that patience, lots of unconditional love, and helping the little girl become resilient and learn social standards; that retaliating violently to violence perpetrated against one is not the answer. What is needed is to find a way to overcome severe trauma and learn to trust again."

Favourite sayings or mottoes

"With passion to the end" [Looks right, downwards] "This is something my dad and I share; a principle that acquired huge meaning after my mom passed away. We decided to do so and live life to the fullest; purpose and passion. My mom passed a few weeks after my 12th birthday."

"'Be kind, stay humble.' My fiancé and I backpacked through Asia, Vietnam. There we experienced the healing power of infinite humility and kindness."

"'Life will never be easy, sure, or perfect. Best understood backwards. We have to live it forward.' I live by this quote. We must learn and grow from our pain; live forward, not in the past."

Three earliest recollections

Antoinette's suggestions for headlines to each story appear above each story. These headlines were only lightly edited.

[Looks up] "I do not have a good memory when it comes to early memories." Antoinette paused a while to regain her composure. After some time, she continued. "Mother's love and compassion expedite infant's healing: I was three years old at the time. My friend came to play at our house. We jumped up and down and I broke my leg (mom and dad were at work). We had a helper that walked with me to the park. I walked there but my leg was very painful. Therefore, she carried me home. Initially, my parents did not regard the injury as serious. The next day my mother took me to the hospital. There they discovered my leg was broken and put it into a cast. I recall the love and compassion mommy displayed."

Mother's loving holding environment soothes ill daughter: "At three, the daycare teacher identified me as having chickenpox and sent me home. Despite being ill, it was very exciting to stay at home. Mom stayed at home with me, watching Peter Pan, etc. We eat pudding and other delicious food. It was just nice to be with her."

Cherished photograph captures a fleeting, special moment in time: "Mmm ..." [Looks right] "I never wanted to sleep in my room. My parents allowed me to sleep in their room on certain days: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. That was so nice. I recall one specific incident when I was allowed to drag my mattress into their room. We ate snacks and called them midnight snacks at 22:00! Dad photographed mom, my dog, and me on the mattress. It was a special day that I will never forget."

Antoinette's life portrait

Antoinette and I worked together to co-construct her portrait.

In step 1, Antoinette and I drew on her response to question 1 to shed light on the challenges she was facing and her preferred strategy for resolving them. She found herself at a crossroads. About to complete her master's degree studies in counselling psychology, she sought guidance on a specific focus area, for instance, community psychology, working in a hospital setting, trauma counselling, custody-related issues, adjustment issues, working with adolescents on, for example, bullying at school, and learning support (developmental issues).

In step 2, Antoinette's earliest recollections were examined to uncover her key preoccupations. Losing her beloved mother at a young age left her devastated, insecure, unsafe, and unprotected. The support of her loving father provided her with a safe and secure holding environment and laid the foundation for how she might in later life go about healing others who had lost their holding environments due to trauma at an early age.

In step 3, we analysed the people Antoinette admired most to clarify her sense of self, values, and life goals and proposed solutions to resolve key challenges in her life. A compassionate, open-minded, sensitive young woman, Antoinette is capable of finding a reason to be positive even in the darkest moments. A woman with strong values, she can see the beauty in even the smallest things. She already exhibits to a large degree the qualities associated with being a psychologist – such as the ability to listen empathetically to others, young people especially, being non-judgmental and positive, and putting people at ease even in difficult times. Her keen sense of humour and empathy help her connect easily with people from different

walks of life and reflect their feelings accurately. "People easily open up to me and feel comfortable around me."

In step 4, we considered Antoinette's responses to questions about her favourite magazine, TV programme, and website for information about environments that will allow her to enact her preferred career. She likes an environment where people can share their micro-stories; where they can communicate with others, share their experiences, and draw on others' stories to change themselves.

In step 5, we analysed Antoinette's favourite story about a character who had experienced challenges similar to those she has to contend with. Like the main character in her favourite book, Antoinette wants to work towards healing children with emotional problems and help them overcome trauma and learn to trust again.

In step 6, we drew on Antoinette's favourite quotations for advice regarding how she might heal others and herself. Having experienced first-hand that life was never meant to be easy, she has learned to stay positive, humble, kind, and helpful and put what has happened in the past behind her.

In step 7, we discussed how she could establish through job analysis whether working with traumatised young people might indeed be her "ideal" field of specialisation in psychology.

In step 8, we returned to her initial request for career counselling. She stated that she had always known that she wanted to work with children who had experienced trauma but needed confirmation that she was on the "right" track. She realised after the intervention that working with traumatised children especially would enable her to fulfil her need to work in communities, in hospital settings, and in environments where she could help young people resolve adjustment and developmental issues, master unmastered assignments successfully, become more resilient, and move forward with hope and passion.

Below is a copy of the life portrait Antoinette and I co-constructed. (S1 relates to step 1 in creating Antoinette's life portrait, *CCI*Q1 to Antoinette's response to question 1 in the CCI, and so on.)

Antoinette's self-portrait

(S1) "I think you could be valuable to me in terms of exploring possible areas in psychology that I might prefer. I am sure I want to work as a psychologist but that is an overly broad term; it is a very big world, and I would like to narrow it down. I thought it was trauma that I wanted to specialise in, but I am not sure if that is the case any longer. I need clarity in terms of, let us say, my internship next year. What would I be attracted to? A community facility? A hospital?

Focusing on traumatic experiences? People in pain? Custody cases? Adjustment issues? Bullying at school? Learning issues? Development? (more towards educational psychology, that is)."

(S2, CCIQ5) "Losing my dearly loved mother, my best friend, at a tender age was excruciatingly painful and traumatic. Her untimely passing left me devastated, insecure, unsafe, and unprotected. (Today still, I often feel unsafe and anxious– like so many other people. We live in a dangerous and unsafe world.) However, the unconditional and uplifting love and care of my precious father helped me deal with what bordered on unbearable heartbreak. He helped me understand that unconditional acceptance, unfailing support, a positive spirit, and an authentic and constructive attitude to life in general and towards clients are key ingredients of any therapeutic strategy or intervention. Having survived a terrible ordeal, it is clear that healing and becoming more resilient again are possible for traumatised young people who have lost their holding environments at an early age. The safe space and environment, validation, and unconditional positive regard showered on me by my father and the psychologists that guided me through terrible times helped me become emotionally healthy again."

(S3, CCIQ1) "I am a compassionate, open-minded, sensitive, disciplined, and motivated woman with strong values and an ability to see the beauty in even the smallest things. Open-minded (non-judgmental), endowed with a keen sense of humour. I am a listener that effortlessly connects with people from different walks of life and reflects their feelings accurately. They easily open up to me and feel comfortable around me. I listen well and can reflect appropriately on what I hear. I am smart enough to understand the destructive power of retaliating and begrudging others or involving myself in senseless, needless fighting. I am not the world's most structured person, but I understand the need for structure in certain contexts. However, I have several areas for development. They include being impatient sometimes, speaking before thinking, rushing to assumptions before gaining adequate, relevant information, becoming pessimistic, not always working as hard as I should, postponing assignments, and procrastinating. Oh, and my administrative skills are less than optimal."

(S4, CCIQ2) "I love listening to others; allowing them to share their many micro-stories with me; sharing in these stories. I draw on that information to enable people, facilitate their development, clarify their beliefs, and motivate them. It gives me great pleasure to learn about and help people manage their unrealistic expectations; ground them in reality – in a sense, even entertain them; help them have fun and enjoy life. I see it as part of my task to help people realise that comparing oneself to others is not helpful. Doing so only hurts, and that is so unnecessary. I love looking good and taking care of my physical wellbeing too; my body. I would love to travel the world, see all the exciting cities, and meet people from all cultures."

(S5, CCIQ3) "Having had to deal with and triumph over profound personal challenges during my life, I understand the agony and hurt of suffering, experiencing deep emotional pain. I realised that one way of dealing with hurt, sorrow, and sadness is by helping others deal with pain. I have a special interest in learning more about and helping people from all walks of life with emotional disturbances and scarring. Those that have been bullied become emotionally healthy again. It excites and inspires me to see people develop and grow; make great strides forward. I believe every setback can be overcome with the support of those who care. This contributes to their development into resilient, emotionally healthy human beings. For me, the key to helping people with emotional challenges become healthy again, enhancing their resilience, making them flourish and overcome trauma, is exercising patience, offering them unconditional love, and rekindling their lost sense of trust in others. However, I am old enough to know that doing so is never a simplistic, easy task. I do know, though, that no matter how much one has suffered, it is best to let go, to move on, without blaming or complaining. To make one's hurt a gift to others."

(S6, CCIQ4) "My trust was severely betrayed and damaged by what happened to my mother [her mother was brutally murdered; however, for ethical and other reasons, any discussion on the circumstances of her death falls outside the scope of this article], and I admit that even today, I do

not trust others too easily. However, my loving father has taught me the value and boundless power of unconditional love and forgiveness. Of never losing hope, never despairing, no matter how big the odds are stacked against one, of retaining my passion until my journey ends and I depart for my heavenly home. He has made me realise that life should be lived to its fullest, purposeful and meaningful. And that, in doing so, I will honour the precious memory of my mother. A deeply religious person, I do not know what my future holds but I certainly know who holds the future. That is good enough for me. I do my utmost to be kind and humble, no matter what. I know well that life was never meant to be easy, sure, or perfect and that we all make mistakes. However, I regard every mistake as an opportunity for further development, for growth. Put differently: Life is best understood backwards and lived forwards (as my father taught me). Those words are meaningful and applicable to my life; words I live by."

"We all have to learn and grow from our loss, hurt, and mistakes; live forward, not in the past. I now realise the fact that I had managed (with the necessary structures, of course) to survive major trauma, that such trauma can be overcome, has equipped me perfectly for the career that I have chosen. Healing is always possible. Knowing this energises me. I will forever draw on the power of this belief and my inner strength to inspire, motivate, help, and be there for scarred, hurt, and traumatised people. Doing that will contribute further to my healing."

I then asked Antoinette to compose her mission and vision statements. She and I jointly agreed on the following wording: "I will become a counselling psychologist specialising in working with emotionally scarred, traumatised young people. That will help me achieve my goal in life, which is to honour the legacy of my beloved parents. That is who I am; my north star; my destiny. In doing so, I will actively master what I have passively suffered in my own life (mission statement). This will help me meet my deepest needs, which are to help people with emotional disturbances and scarring, and those that have been bullied become emotionally healthy again and resolve intra- and interpersonal issues. Additionally, I intend to combine my deep sense of love and respect for others in general, my respect for the timeless values that define me, my deep sense of caring, and my desire to provide a holding environment for people with trauma and scarring. I intend to write a book on my life, open a facility for people with trauma and scarring, and become a renowned advocate for their rights" (vision statement).

I used this self-portrait to identify the resources Antoinette needed to devise an action strategy to realise her stated aims. Recommended for investigation (after completing her current studies, followed by an internship) included enrolling for short courses in, for example, (i) therapeutic strategies to help children and adults with trauma and scarring, (ii) dealing with common and less common inter- and intrapersonal "problems" experienced by such persons, (iii) forensic work (to provide an informed, expert opinion in courts of law on their behalf), and (iv) courses on ways to restore the dignity of individuals with an impaired sense of self and identity – young people in particular. Hypnotherapy courses would also be useful. Antoinette was reminded about the numerous employment opportunities here and abroad. She was urged to consider completing her doctoral studies and taking up a post at a university after or during her studies.

I then suggested that Antoinette should return home, think about these recommendations, and report back to me if she wanted to.

Wrapping up the counselling session

Antoinette's sensitivity, her love for others, her selflessness, and her desire to provide a holding environment for those who are suffering or who have suffered, as well as her interest in taking care of herself and her appearance, prompted me to make the following comment at the end of the session:

> "It feels as if I am standing in the presence of a compassionate, selfless, brave, courageous, and inspirational counselling psychologist; an advocate with timeless values and principles; a born advocate for the rights of people who have suffered deeply. She will stop at nothing to help them, even if that means having to make sacrifices. She is well-grounded in her values (which include her religious views) and will inspire many young (as well as older) people. Above all, she will strive to restore the sense of pride, dignity, self-respect, and identity of people who have suffered trauma and scarring. Helping them feel held; helping them turn their hurt into hope and social contributions. Antoinette, you are that inspirational counselling psychologist, healer, advocate for the rights of people who have suffered trauma from having been bullied and having experienced other similar challenges, a true heroine, and a great inspiration for me."

Follow-up

After the session, I asked Antoinette to respond to a few questions. Her responses are given below:

(a)   How did you experience the intervention? "I experienced the intervention as meaningful. I enjoyed being allowed to share my story, my pain; to talk; to experience the healing power of the release of deep emotions. Reading over my 'life portrait' helped me identify and recognise aspects of myself I was unaware of. I never realised what a prominent role my own trauma and loss could play in helping others overcome their challenges. I also appreciate the emphasis on the role of my parents, particularly that of my father, who plays (ed) a significant role in my life in terms of growing, learning, and overcoming life challenges. I believe one can overcome almost anything in life, hence my great fondness for Victor Frankl's theories."

(b)   What else should I know about you that did not come out during the intervention? "I think something I neglected to share was my fascination with human behaviour and the reasons for people's behaviours. Possibly something in the direction of what makes some people more resilient than others, or why some people bully others."

(c)   What changes did you experience during the intervention? "I experienced increased self-awareness, self-insight, and clarity regarding my interests, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as the significant influence my life experiences have had on my choice of career and interests."

(d)   What prompted these changes? "I think the questions asked and the process of reflecting on some of my earliest recollections. Also, highlighting my strengths, areas for development ('weaknesses'), preferences, and values helped guide the self-insight process."

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the effect of online career construction counselling on a trauma survivor

who was unsure about what career to pursue. I answered the research questions by appraising and relating the study outcomes to the findings of other studies on the topic. Two research questions were examined:

(a)   What was the influence of the intervention on the participant's sense of career identity?

(b)   What was the effect of the intervention on the participant's career choice ambivalence?

These questions are discussed below.

What was the effect of the intervention on the participant's sense of career identity?

The unconditional love and support of Antoinette's father (and the support she received from caring psychologists) moderated the potential adverse effects of her mother's death on her mastery of key development assignments during childhood. Her responses to the questions about her favourite social networking facility suggested that her sense of self and pride in her achievements and abilities may have been marginally impacted by the loss of her mother (to whom she could not turn for validation at a pivotal stage in her development). However, her father's love tempered this adverse effect as confirmed by her response to the question on her favourite book. The support of her father, as well as the counselling of compassionate therapists, helped mitigate the effect of her trauma following the death of her mother. This could, for example, be seen in her enhanced sense of self and career identity. She realised that she wanted to work with emotionally scarred or traumatised people such as those who had been bullied – especially young people. She also realised that in helping younger people especially become emotionally stronger, she would be "healing" herself too. Having lost her mother at a young age, Antoinette was deprived of her mother's support in mastering assignments that were becoming increasingly complex. The outcomes revealed an improvement in Antoinette's acquisition of the twin meta-competencies of adaptability and sense of career identity (Savickas and Savickas 2019). This finding confirms the findings of researchers such as Del Corso, Rehfuss, and Galvin (2011), Maree (2019), and Taber and Briddick (2011) regarding the power of the CCI to enhance people's career adaptability and their sense of self- and career identity. The participant's enhanced career adaptability and self-identity should help her deal successfully with any future restraints and constraints in her work life (Guichard 2009). They should also help her respond successfully to the repeated changes and insecurity in a workplace that can no longer "hold" workers securely (Winnicott 1965).

The "storyline" that permeates and "glues" together the participant's self- and career

identity indicates who she is, what she wishes to do in the workplace, why she exists, and why enacting her key life theme (her desire to work with traumatised youth especially) is so important (Savickas 2019). The findings correlate positively with Fouad, Cotter, and Kantamneni (2009) and Gati et al.'s (2013) view that merely providing more information (of whatever kind) alone does not decrease people's career choice ambivalence (uncertainty). The findings also confirm Nota, Santilli, and Soresi's (2016) finding that career construction intervention enhances people's career adaptability and thus also their career decidedness. Lastly: The findings support Hartung, Taylor, and Taber's (2022, 2) belief that people's affective states correlate strongly with key career decision-making "*processes of occupational engagement, career adaptability, and career decidedness*".

What was the effect of the intervention on the participant's career choice ambivalence?

The intervention assisted the participant in clarifying her career choice. All three developmental layers of her psychological self also benefited in varying degrees from the intervention (McAdams 2010; 2013) and promoted constructing, deconstructing, co-constructing, and reconstructing the participant's macro- or "grand" career-life story. She later further benefited by drawing on this story for advice regarding her future choice of an area of specialisation (autobiographicity). The research also supports the findings of Maree (2014), which showed the value of career construction intervention in the case of traumatised individuals.

The participant's feedback at various stages also indicated the intervention's marginal enhancement of her sense of self-insight in respect of her interests and social roles (the psychological self as a social actor – see her responses to the question on her three role models (Gülsen, Seçim, and Savickas 2021). Her answers also qualitatively confirmed her elevated level of adaptability and her readiness to act adaptively when life imposed changes on her (enhancing the psychological self as a motivated agent). Also enhanced was her ability to clarify her personal and career goals, motives, and plans and thus arrive at more appropriate and better-informed career choice-related decisions (the self as a motivated agent) (Gülsen et al. 2021). Above all, though, the intervention advanced the participant's authoring of her career-life story as an autobiographical author. After the intervention, she could advise herself on why she had sought career counselling (the "presenting problem"). Integrating her micro-stories and drawing on her "autobiography" (autobiographicity) (autobiographical author) also helped her integrate her conscious knowledge with her subconscious insights about herself, thus promoting her psychological functioning and sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997). Put differently, the participant and I jointly wove her disconnected and unconnected past and her present and future

into a unified, purpose-laden, and hope-filled career-life story. The study confirmed McAdams' (2010, 181) finding that "[n]umerous studies have shown that deriving positive meanings from negative events are associated with life satisfaction and indicators of emotional wellbeing". The participant in this study also derived positive meaning from her traumatic experience.

The findings of the study furthermore support Taber et al. (2011) whose findings also show the value of the career construction interview in creating the kind of career-life story referred to as a "life portrait", which can help people deal with trauma and bolster or rekindle their sense of hope for the future. In addition, the present research confirmed the power of creating and drawing on people's life portraits to help them connect their conscious knowledge with their subconscious insights about themselves to promote narratability and autobiographicity. They thus identify central life themes and connect unconnected dots that jointly constitute their career-life autobiography. The findings also support those of Hartung et al. (2022) and Rottinghaus, Jenkins, and Jantzer (2009) whose research underscored the importance of linking positive as well as negative emotions to key career-choice practices.

The findings of the present study strongly support Biank and Werner-Lin (2011, 271) who recommend that young people who have experienced major trauma should receive "coordinated care" when they "move beyond the initial trauma of parental loss into various stages of grief and reintegration". The findings also support the view of Chater et al. (2022, 1) that young people who have experienced parental bereavement rarely receive therapy mainly because of a lack of awareness of the availability of such help or the actual lack of such help. These authors conclude that "[e]nabling open conversations about grief and identifying suitable support is a public health priority".

Limitations

First, it should be noted that the context in which the research was done is not typical of the contexts in which the overwhelming majority of traumatised young people in developing countries (such as South Africa) find themselves. Second, my bias towards people who have experienced personal trauma earlier in their lives may have influenced my judgment to some extent. Third, more longitudinal research in diverse contexts is needed to confirm or dispute the value of the intervention described here. Fourth, the time involved in crafting life portraits may deter some of those interested in replicating the research. Fifth, research on how the crafting of life portraits can be streamlined and applied in group contexts is needed to facilitate wider implementation of the intervention. Sixth, the participant's openness to new ways of administering career counselling may have positively influenced her intervention experience. Lastly: Whereas the online assessment and intervention proceeded smoothly in general, the

finer nuances of non-verbal communication might not have been observed adequately. In-person communication helps create a "sacred" or safe communication space (Savickas 2019) and enables close watching of body language such as facial expressions and bodily movements. Such observations can subsequently be linked to the counsellee's beliefs, cognitions, feelings, attitudes, and moods and shed light on the "bigger picture". Online counselling (even when it is provided in synchronous face time) impedes such observation, resulting in the possible loss of valuable meta-information in addition to the kind of information yielded by verbal communication only (Maree 2022a; 2022b).

Advice to others who may wish to conduct this type of intervention

Intensive professional training in administering career construction counselling and writing life portraits is crucial before psychologists practise the intervention. Attending CPD courses on the intervention is therefore essential as is conducting the intervention under the watchful eyes of supervisors and mentors. People who request this kind of counselling should feel safe and "held" before any intervention commences. The creation of a safe or "sacred" space is needed to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and a sound therapeutic relationship. Lastly: Psychologists interested in implementing the intervention described here should attend courses in trauma counselling to help them deal with possible traumatic responses to questions such as people's earliest recollections.

Follow-up after 12 months

After 12 months, the participant (Antoinette) said the following about her progress:

> "Currently, I am doing very well. I completed my internship at a private practice last year as an internal counselling psychologist and accepted a 'locum' position this year. I am currently very busy with both family and individual therapy, as well as psychometric tests. I recently passed my board exam. The concepts and 'topics' I currently work with the most are depression and anxiety in both children and young adults but also adults currently. Adapting to or during divorce, major life changes, and social communication skills is also a big topic. I enjoy it immensely and feel very privileged to have been able to have such an incredible opportunity."

CONCLUSION

Administering career construction in the manner described in this article and drawing on its outcomes to facilitate writing people's self-portraits is an underreported topic. Yet, this kind of intervention has the power to update and revamp career counselling to meet today's needs. It facilitates reflection and reflexivity to promote narratability and autobiographicity, enhances people's career adaptability and identity, encourages agency and authorship of people's career-

life stories, and helps people deal with career choice ambivalence. More particularly, used by experienced and sufficiently trained psychologists, this kind of intervention can uncover the origins of career choice ambivalence, promote positive forward movement, and have a lasting impact on participants' wellbeing (O'Reilly 2013; Rath, Harter, and Harter 2010). In addition, as the case study has shown, successful implementation of the intervention discussed in this article can facilitate continuity in the career-life stories of people who experienced major trauma in their early lives and help them approach transitions and handle insecurity such as that in the workplace more adaptively and successfully. Lastly, the intervention's flexibility can be seen in the seamless manner in which it was administered online.

NOTES

i)   Antoinette's verbatim responses have been edited only lightly to conserve their authenticity.
ii)   Guiding lines rather than role models.
iii)   I thank Tim Steward for his editing of the text.

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