



Life Design Career Counselling with an Abandoned Adolescent: A Case Study

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This article describes the value of life design counselling with an abandoned adolescent female. The participant was selected purposively from among a group of abandoned adolescent females who had expressed a need for career counselling. The life intervention comprised two 90-minute sessions per week over a period of a month. Life design data included collage, family constellation, life line, career style interview, asset map and life chapters. Following the intervention, the participant demonstrated career adaptability and an eagerness to take an active part in her evolving life story. Life design counselling has potential to meet the career counselling needs of children with neglect and abandonment experience.

■ **Keywords:** life design counselling; postmodern; narrative; abandoned; adolescent; career counselling, career construction; self-construction

The number of children being abandoned in South Africa is rising at an alarming rate. In 2010 the acting Gauteng coordinator of Child Welfare SA was quoted by Molatlhwa (2010) as saying that between 2,000 and 2,300 cases of child abandonment and neglect have been recorded over the last three years. This amounts to an increase of between 8% and 10% year on year. Parker (2009) reported that the number of people who have applied to adopt children and to offer themselves as foster parents are declining, while the cases of child abandonment and neglect have increased. The Door of Hope ministry (in Parker, 2009) in Johannesburg also noted that the number of abandoned and neglected children they accept has increased from four a month in 2004 to 12 a month in 2010. Even with the above statistics available, it would appear as though the exact number of abandoned children in South Africa cannot be established. This is partly because institutions such as hospitals did not record data regarding the amount of abandoned children they cared for annually (Brink, 2000). However, the reasons for the increase in the number of children being abandoned in South Africa are also unclear.

Children with abandonment carry extreme risk to their developmental needs, including career development. The concept 'abandoned' is multidimensional and the subjective meaning attached to the term is unique for different individuals. Abandonment refers to the voluntary

relinquishing of control over children by their natal parent or guardian, whether by leaving them somewhere, selling them, or legally consigning authority to some other person or institution (Brink, 2000). The term abandoned includes the concepts of 'context', 'culture', 'cultural identity' and 'diversity'. Although these terms overlap and influence one another, they will be discussed separately in this article.

Among some of the reasons for child abandonment in South Africa is poverty from many causes, including unemployment or family disruption (Brink, 2000; Kgole, 2007). When parents cannot provide for their children, some may abandon them (Gerlach, 2010). Other cases involve adolescents being abandoned after falling pregnant (Girvin, 2004). Kgole (2007) and Balcom (1998) found family disruption and divorce play central roles in children being abandoned by one or both parents. In the South African context, a major factor in the abandonment of children is the HIV and AIDS pandemic as AIDS-related illnesses and deaths lead to a large numbers of orphans.

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We sought to apply a postmodern career facilitation approach to collaboratively design a preferred life for an adolescent with abandonment, addressing her career development needs. Career facilitation is about *life planning* (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b). The focus is on life with its variety of elements that have an impact on the individual as a whole and on the unique abilities of the individual and his or her decisions. Life design counselling is informed by self-construction theory.

Self-Construction Theory

Self-construction theory considers individuals proactive agents whose prime activity is self-organisation in order to maintain order and continuity in their experience (Mahoney in Guichard & Dauwalder, 2010). Guichard and Lenz (2005) stress the importance of the individual's context by noting that individuals construct themselves in a specific way, in relation to specific modes of relating to themselves that exist at a given moment in a given society. As plural beings in a postmodern society individuals connect their different current life domains and order them according to various prospects.

Life Design Counselling

In life design counselling the focus in terms of context is on the relationship between the individual and his/her environment and the interaction that occurs within this system with its subsystems (Zunker, 1998).

At the heart of life design counselling is the use of narratives. A client uses narratives under the guidance of a counsellor in order to make sense of experiences and events (Maree, 2008). The language used in the construction of narratives is the client's own and is influenced by the cultural context in which the client finds him/herself. Maree (in press) observes that career counsellors, as co-authors of the client's life story, help the client to narrate their careers as stories by pointing out certain themes and tensions in the storyline and by teaching them the skills needed for rendering the next episode. In this way the counsellor adds to the language available to the client to express the interpretation of his/her environment. According to Savickas (in press), people's experiences in their families enable them to invent social roles as an actor. They then modify these roles and 'act' them out on the stages of the school, community and society, all the while writing their autobiographical stories. These stories illuminate and ensure stability and consistency in work-related experiences.

Savickas et al. (2009) contend that life design counselling brings together self- and career construction through open-ended conversations. Life design counselling also incorporates the challenges and needs that an individual experiences in his/her unique environment. The process is thus not only focused on a career decision, career development or career construction, but also pro-

notes a design of an individual's life that can change and be redesigned as life experiences change (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b, Maree in press).

Description of a Typical Life Design Intervention

This model comprises six steps: (i) define the problem and identify what the client hopes to achieve, (ii) the client and counsellor explore his/her current system of subjective identity forms,¹ (iii) open perspectives by narrating the client's story and reviewing this story, (iv) place the problem in a new story, (v) specify activities for the client to put into practice and (vi) follow-up. It aims to increase clients' adaptability, narratability and activity. Adaptability deals with change, while narratability deals with continuity. Together these two outcomes provide individuals with the flexibility to address their life development needs creatively. Life design also includes exploration of actual activities during which the person learns which abilities and interests he/she would prefer to exercise (Savickas et al., 2009).

Goals of the Study

Our goal was to demonstrate the value of life design counselling with an adolescent with abandonment to enhance the participant's adaptability, narratability and activity, thereby enabling her to achieve her life goals. Our specific research questions were:

- (a) How can a life design approach be applied in the case of an abandoned, adolescent woman who seeks career counselling?
- (b) How can psychologists facilitate a reflection on and analysis of her career adaptability needs in such a way that career and life design counselling is promoted?

Method

Case Description

Selection criteria called for an abandoned adolescent experiencing a need for career counselling (Crous, 2011). The participant (Agnes²) was a purposefully selected 18-year-old, Black, abandoned adolescent female. Her home language is Afrikaans but she also speaks fluent English, as well as '*most African languages*'. She is currently in Grade 12 and soon has to make a decision about her future and career options. Agnes was abandoned by her mother at the age of 1 year and 3 months and her grandmother took her in. Agnes lived with her grandmother until the age of 15 at which time she was removed to a place of safety and later moved to a children's home in Pretoria.

Data Gathering

The research design was qualitative (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a, 2007b) in nature relying extensively on a case study approach. The investigation was based on an interpretivist paradigm involving understanding and interpreting meanings as revealed during interactions.

Data sources were (i) *observation* by the (primary) researcher (Crous), which was documented in field notes and a research diary, (ii) *informal conversational data* during the interaction between the participant and researcher, which were recorded and transcribed, and (iii) the participant's *journal* in which she reflected on her experience of each session. The following techniques were employed to facilitate data collection: the collage, the success and failure experiences, life story and life line techniques (Cochran, 1997, 2007), the career style interview (Savickas, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, in press) and informal conversation.

Intervention Procedure

The life design counselling process. The life design counselling model, as described by Savickas and his colleagues (2009), was integrated with the life design process as suggested by Campbell and Ungar (2004a) to serve as the framework for this case study. According to this approach (Savickas et al., 2009) the adolescent is involved in a process comprising six general, nonlinear steps or episodes (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b), each dealing with an aspect of life design. The sequence of the steps differs from individual to individual and it is important to begin at the step where the participant finds him/herself to be. The process relies on the co-construction of meaning with regards to the participant's life design through the use of social dialogue between the participant and the researcher. The aspects that are involved in the life design process (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b; Savickas et al., 2009) and through which the participant worked during the study were as follows:

Summary of the life design intervention across the six sessions. The life design counselling process was developed and implemented twice a week over a one-month period (Crous, 2011). The intervention incorporated postmodern career facilitation techniques (Cochran, 1997, 2007; Maree, 2008) to enhance the involvement of the participant in her life design process, promote self-exploration and facilitate co-constructive conversation.

During the first session Agnes was given the opportunity to make a visual representation of her personal characteristics and preferences in the form of a collage. In the next session, Agnes was given the opportunity to make a schematic representation of her family, which was used to facilitate conversation. In the course of the third session, she was given the opportunity to visually represent the course of her life as a chronological sequence with positive and negative milestones. This was also used to facilitate conversation. Session four was devoted to an attempt to facilitate the construction of meaning with regards to life structure (role importance), career adaptability strategies (concern, control, curiosity and confidence), life themes (motivations and strivings) and personality style. During Session five it was attempted to construct meaning with regards to the intrinsic and extrinsic assets Agnes possesses. Assets that were intrinsic to Agnes were identified first. During the last session, themes and patterns that were identified during the previous sessions were confirmed and an attempt was made to identify new themes.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, the documented data were organised and categories, themes and patterns identi-

TABLE 1
Framework for Life Design Counselling

Aspects of life/work	Process to be followed in facilitating life design counselling with the participant
Know what you want: Define the problem and identify what the client hopes to achieve	Co-construct with the participant stories about needs, values, life purpose, interests and passions. Investigate with the participant experiences in the environment that allow him/her to live out his/her preferred future. Investigate with the participant the meaning of 'preferred future'. Facilitate the participant to set goals.
Know what you have: Explore the current system of subjective identity forms	Identify with the participant internal and external sources that will aid in goal attainment.
Know what you hear: Open perspectives by narrating and reviewing the story	Identify with the participant internal and external voices that support his/her preferred future. Identify with the participant internal and external voices that he/she would want to amplify or turn down.
Know what constrains you: Place the problem into the new story	Identify with the participant the stories that constrain him/her from his/her preferred future. Re-author with the participant new stories and old stories that are more expansive.
Map your preferred story: Specify activities that try on and actualise the chosen identity	Develop with the participant a map that takes him/her from the present to his/her preferred future.
Grow into and out of your story: Follow up	Allow the participant to act out one story at a time by means of role-play. Work with the participant and assume that the preferred story will evolve over time. Explore with the participant new opportunities in the environment. With the participant, anticipate and plan for major life transitions in the future.

Adapted from Campbell and Ungar, 2004b; Savickas et al., 2009.

TABLE 2**Summary of Identified Themes and Subthemes**

Theme 1: Personal Characteristics	
Definition: This relates to inherent character traits of the individual that are not likely to change over time.	
Subtheme 1.1 Autonomy/Independence	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 1.2 Resilience/Perseverance	Sessions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 1.3 Structured/organised	Sessions 1, 4
Theme 2: Personal Values	
Definition: This relates to principles or standards that the individual regards as important to leading a meaningful life.	
Subtheme 2.1 Discipline/Obey the rules	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 2.2 Intimate personal relationships/Family	Sessions 1, 3, 4, 5
Subtheme 2.3 Mutual respect	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 5
Subtheme 2.4 Religion	Sessions 1, 2, 4, 6
Subtheme 2.5 Sexual morality	Sessions 1, 3
Subtheme 2.6 Work ethic	Sessions 1, 3, 4
Theme 3: Intrapersonal Skills	
Definition: This relates to skills that can change and/or develop over time.	
Subtheme 3.1 Amazed at own abilities	Sessions 3, 4, 6
Subtheme 3.2 Fights for others' rights	Sessions 2, 4, 5
Subtheme 3.3 Financially responsible	Sessions 1, 4
Subtheme 3.4 Good judge of character	Sessions 2, 5, 6
Subtheme 3.5 Openness to new experiences	Sessions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 3.6 Racial/cultural awareness	Sessions 1, 3, 5, 6
Subtheme 3.7 Self-insight	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 3.8 Self-knowledge/Self-awareness	Sessions 1, 3, 5, 6
Theme 4: Painful Past	
Definition: This relates to the individual's experience of his/her past as physically or emotionally distressing.	
Subtheme 4.1 Change	Sessions 1, 2, 6
Subtheme 4.2 Disappointment/Let down	Sessions 1, 3, 6
Subtheme 4.3 Experience of loss	Sessions 2, 6
Subtheme 4.4 Feelings of rejection	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 6
Subtheme 4.5 Inadequate domestic circumstances	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 6
Subtheme 4.6 Helplessness in terms of circumstances	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
Subtheme 4.7 Unhealthy interpersonal relationships	Sessions 1, 2, 3
Theme 5: Interpersonal Relationship Dynamics	
Definition: This relates to the motivation or driving force underlying the individual's relationships with others.	
Subtheme 5.1 Need for unconditional acceptance	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 5.2 Need for control/to be in charge	Sessions 1, 4, 5
Subtheme 5.3 Need for guidance/support	Sessions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 5.4 Need to be heard/acknowledged	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 5
Subtheme 5.5 Need to be nurtured/cherished	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 5.6 Need to belong	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
Subtheme 5.7 Difficult to trust in relationships	Sessions 1, 2, 4, 5
Theme 6: Personal Motivators	
Definition: This relates to the individual's internal processes which serve to activate, guide and maintain his/her behaviour.	
Subtheme 6.1 Employability	Sessions 2, 4
Subtheme 6.2 Longing to be carefree/happy	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
Subtheme 6.3 Need for security/stability	Sessions 1, 2, 4, 6
Subtheme 6.4 Need for stimulation/challenges	Session 4
Subtheme 6.5 Need to nurture/cherish	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 6.6 Self-actualisation	Sessions 2, 4, 6
Subtheme 6.7 Systemic/environmental influences	Sessions 2, 5, 6
Theme 7: Decision-Making Style	
Definition: This relates to the manner in which the individual goes about making decisions.	
Subtheme 7.1 Rational decision-making	Sessions 1, 4, 5
Theme 8: Future Orientation	
Definition: This relates to the individual's expectations and the degree to which he/she is thoughtful about his/her future.	
Subtheme 8.1 Ongoing journey/process of self-development	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 8.2 Setting goals	Session 6
Theme 9: Coping Strategies	
Definition: This relates to the manner in which the individual responds to a problem or threatening situation.	
Subtheme 9.1 Adaptability	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Subtheme 9.2 Adequate regulation and expression of emotions	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4
Subtheme 9.3 Anger/Hurt	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 6
Subtheme 9.4 Anxiety	Sessions 1, 3, 5, 6
Subtheme 9.5 Creativity	Sessions 1, 4, 5
Subtheme 9.6 Denial/Escaping/Avoiding behaviour	Sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Subtheme 9.7 Inadequate emotional regulation	Sessions 1, 3, 4, 6
Subtheme 9.8 Negative body image	Sessions 1, 3
Subtheme 9.9 Self-assertive behaviour	Sessions 2, 3, 5, 6

fied. The data were evaluated and categorised and, finally, the identified categories were compared with existing knowledge (literature) on life design.

Ethical Issues

Permission for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. Informed consent was obtained from the participant, and privacy, confidentiality and anonymity was maintained. Measures to ensure the research's participant's wellbeing and protection from harm were implemented throughout the study. The researcher gave feedback to the participant during all the phases of the inquiry. The research findings were released in an acceptable and responsible manner.

Results

Nine main themes (see Table 2) emerged from a qualitative analysis of the data: personal characteristics, personal values, intrapersonal skills, painful past, interpersonal relationship dynamics, personal motivators, decision-making style, future orientation and coping strategies. The main themes will be discussed together with the meaningful subthemes.

Main Themes

Personal characteristics. The participant described herself as 'a person who likes depending on people but not too much' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation) and revealed a sense of autonomy by noting that she did her 'own projects and homework without any help'. She revealed herself to be 'self-sufficient' (Session 4, during the career style interview).

She noted that she likes things to be 'structured and organised and sorted' and described herself as 'a very structured person' (Session 1, while discussing the collage). Her resilient attitude was revealed by saying 'I'm trying something new so let's just keep working at it. I'll get there someday' (Session 4, during the career style interview) and she identified 'perseverance' as a personal asset (Session 5, while discussing the asset map). She explained her approach to challenges as follows: 'if something is too big for you to climb over you try to take it down, right? If you can't climb the wall you bust through it' (Session 3, while discussing the life line).

Personal values. The participant indicated several values that she holds in high regard. She appreciates a 'rules-set environment where you have consequences' (Session 1, while discussing the collage) and believes in 'following the rules' (Sessions 2, 3 & 4). She values intimate 'personal relationships' (Session 4, during the career style interview) and longs for a 'family bond that is much stronger' (Session 1, while discussing the collage) and relationships that 'meant a lot' (Session 3, while discussing the life line). She reflected the importance of mutual respect: 'if you're a person who

demands respect and gives none in return then ... screw you basically' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation) and the value of treating the 'environment with respect' (Session 3, while discussing the life line).

She conveyed a sense of sexual morality, saying about sexual relations outside of marriage: 'I don't think it's fine. I just don't agree with it' (Session 1, while discussing the collage) and that this kind of intimacy is meant to be 'in this whole marriage set-up' (Session 3, while discussing the life line). Furthermore, the participant values hard work and believes 'you have to work for everything you want' (Session 1, while discussing the collage).

Intrapersonal skills. The participant expressed self-knowledge in Session 1 (discussion of the collage) 'I love salad, except for carrot salad. And I don't eat beans ... I don't like them. I like fruits. I like bran ...' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation). She demonstrated openness to learning and experiencing new things and appeared to be amazed by her own abilities and interests: 'I was also never interested in National Geographic or Discovery until Grade ten or nine. I was like wow, this is actually interesting. It's like my mind opened up' (Session 6, while discussing the life chapters).

She finds it easy to stand up for others: 'it's not that I'm standing up for me. I can handle it. ... But what about the other people who don't know how to speak for themselves?' She added that she 'hate[s] it when people are being repressed' and that she would carry the 'suffering for everybody else' and described herself as 'a good judge of character' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation).

The enhanced self-awareness the participant revealed with regard to her emotions, behaviour and perspectives during the life design process is indicated by the following extract: 'I understand why I did what I did and I understand how' (Session 6, while discussing the life chapters).

Painful past. The stressful circumstances the participant experienced in her past emerged from the conversations on the collage, the family constellation, the life line and the life chapters (Sessions 1, 2, 3, & 6). She described the situation as 'abusive' and felt 'threatened'. She revealed that she felt 'abandoned' and 'it just felt like she didn't want [her] anymore'. The participant mentioned influences from unhealthy interpersonal relationships and inadequate domestic circumstances that left her feeling disappointed and let down. She described experiences of change and loss and expressed feelings of helplessness with regard to these circumstances.

Interpersonal relationship dynamics. The participant articulated her difficulty to trust in relationships as having her 'guard up' but 'if you can get on the inside somehow, then we can talk' (Sessions 2 & 5). She expressed a need for unconditional acceptance: 'you never felt out even if you were sticking out a bit' (Session 3, while discussing the life line), a need for acknowledgment: 'he understood my side of the

whole situation' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation), a need to be in control, stating that she wants 'to be the boss' and 'control everything' (Session 1, while discussing the collage) and a need for 'guidance' and 'support' (Session 6, while discussing the life chapters). She also communicated a longing to belong: 'I want my mom and my dad and a big brother or a little brother ... And then ... I felt happy that at least somebody else has what I don't have' (Session 1, while discussing the collage) and 'even when you're alone you're still part of the group' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation).

Personal motivators. The participant revealed during her life design process that she is motivated by internal factors (self-actualisation) prompting her to be the true 'essence of [her] being' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation) and noted that she wants 'to achieve great things and go all the way to the top because I'm driven to success' (Session 4, during the career style interview). She also considered systemic/environmental factors that motivate her choices: 'I don't just have to consider myself and what I can do but I have to consider what everyone else is doing as well' (Session 5, while discussing the asset map). Furthermore, the participant disclosed that she is motivated by a need for security and stability: 'I want to feel safe ... I want a steady job. Not something I can fall in and out of. I want to be sure of what I'm going to get' (Session 1, while discussing the collage), and a need to nurture and cherish others: 'I have a mothering instinct' and 'I need to be needed' (Session 6, while discussing the life chapters).

She expressed her need for stimulation and challenges as she gets 'bored easily, so every day has to be a new challenge' (Session 4, during the career style interview). The participant wants to be employable and 'upgrade the whole time ... to become qualified so that I can do the whole job' (Session 4, during the career style interview).

Decision-making style. The participant revealed a rational decision-making style during Session 1 (discussion of the collage) by considering the 'pros and cons' and asking questions such as 'how, what, when, why, where, what would be the problem?' when making decisions.

Future orientation. The participant articulated her orientation towards the future as an ongoing process of self-development: 'I'm on a journey to self-discovery ... through my present into my future' (Sessions 2 & 4). Kotzé (2002) notes that goal-setting is a powerful mechanism because the individual assigns specific focuses to his/her energies and is enabled to sort out what is important and what is irrelevant in his/her life. The participant started to set goals for her future during Session 6.

Coping strategies. The participant indicated several types of coping strategies during the life design process. She revealed adaptability to life circumstances:

I just am. It's like if I were a paragraph, something in a paragraph, not like the story, just the paragraph ... we always have those activities where you have to fill in the correct word. The sentence would say like G be. And then you have to say am, is or are. I would be the be, because I can am and I can is and I can are (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation).

She also demonstrated self-assertive behaviour: 'I learned how to stand up for myself' (Session 3, while discussing the life line). The participant demonstrated positive emotional regulation and control stating: 'I get this emotion and I'm like I will kill this person. But I do have the willpower not to' (Session 2, while discussing the family constellation). She also described herself as 'creative' (Session 4, during the career style interview)

The participant also revealed that she makes use of inadequate strategies for expression and regulation of her emotions: 'I gained an anger problem ... or I think it's an anger problem because I was never an angry person and now I get angry like this' (Session 1, while discussing the collage). She also denies her emotions: 'It doesn't matter anymore ... it just doesn't matter', tries to escape 'to get away as much as possible' and revealed that she gets 'these anxiety attacks' (Session 1, while discussing the collage). The participant expressed deep-seated feelings of anger and hurt (Session 1, 2, 3 & 6). She indicated a negative body image: 'I have a funny image of myself. Like, today I look fat in this area and then I look fat in that area' (Session 3, while discussing the life line).

Co-constructive conversations did thus not necessarily solve her problems, but she did become aware of the meanings she assigns, the motivation for her behaviour and her view of herself. In addition, she showed greater insight into herself as was evident from the following remark during the last conversation:

I wanted to go and reflect back on my life and see why I did things I did or whether it really impacted my life in such a way that I don't look like a little church girl with long skirts and ankle boots. I want to see whether the change that was going to be made, had I not been influenced by those things, was going to be good or bad.

Discussion

Agnes demonstrated good insight into the process of life design counselling. Her openness to new experiences and her inner-directedness, for instance, bode well for the future. People high on openness to experience are inclined to be curious, imaginative, empathetic, psychologically minded and flexible (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). However, her avoidance of her feelings deserves attention. Individuals attempt, according to Carr (2006), to protect themselves psychologically or physically by avoidance-focused behaviour.

Agnes's demonstration of adaptability should serve her well in the future. Maree (2010) confirms that individuals are considered adaptable when they act in an appropriate

manner in a specific situation. In addition, to remain employable the individual has to be committed to an ongoing development of skills and abilities to such an extent that he/she is able to offer what is required in the future (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Agnes seems to grasp this because she realises the importance of qualifications.

Agnes's realisation that she is starting to unravel how her past has affected her shows that she is actualising career construction theory in her life design as she attempts to navigate transitions and transcend the weakness of the past and present (Maree, 2010). She reflected readiness to cope with change (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a). Her self-insight and goal-setting is a potentially powerful mechanism (Kotzé, 2002). Agnes's increased perception of her vocational future as a continuation of her life story and her willingness to use her potential indicates a willingness to become the creator of her own identity, instead of feeling determined by external influences (Spain & Bedard in Bujold, 2004).

Life design counselling appears appropriate for the career-related counselling of an abandoned adolescent female to construct aspects of her life course, including career issues. In addition, it appears as though the postmodern techniques implemented in this study, promoted the participant's active involvement with co-construction of her life situation. The life design counselling process appeared to change the adolescent's as manifested by her proactive behaviour towards the challenges in her life.

We consider the participant to be better equipped to start confronting the complexities of negotiating career planning when faced with certain contextual challenges. She appears encouraged to realise specific goals that could stand her in good stead in her career development. For instance, exploring the participant's past experiences, identifying role models and discussing assets may have resulted in an increased understanding of the participant's socialisation needs and abilities, possibly resulting in the proactive behaviour she articulated. In addition, these conversations could have contributed to the heightened self-insight she revealed into her experiences and perceptions.

Limitations of the Study

Life design counselling provides a potentially powerful and useful strategy that may be used to enable persons to design successful lives. However, it also seems vitally important to note that successful implementation of the strategy will, to a large extent, be determined by and dependent on appropriate professional training of life design counsellors in the narrative tradition and perspective. Furthermore, creating a 'sacred space' (Savickas, 1998) on which the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client can be built, first, seems nonnegotiable. Lastly, due attention should be paid throughout to identification and interpretation of nonverbal communication, as well as to use of conversational modalities (such as reformulating clients' comments appropriately, paying due attention to clients' questions; for example, only pro-

viding clients with stimuli that meet the criterion of being in the area of 'proximal development of the client').

Recommendations

To broaden the applicability of the findings, the study should firstly serve as a pilot for the life design counselling process for application in a large number of cases. Secondly, comparison with other case studies is essential. Thirdly, future investigations into the long-term impact of life design counselling on various populations. Fourthly, the merits and limits of this process when applied in groups need to be researched. Fifthly, students in psychology will benefit from the inclusion in curricula of the basics of life design counselling. Ideally, these modules should also be presented by psychologists in full-time practice. Lastly, psychologists should be encouraged to conduct research in this field and publish in scholarly journals and/or present at conferences on psychology.

Conclusion

The value of life design counselling with an abandoned adolescent was investigated in this study. That a Black, abandoned adolescent female took part in the study is practically insignificant. On the contrary, we would like to emphasise the following: It is our conviction that the scope of counselling, and not only life design counselling, should be expanded to include the full spectrum of diversity in South Africa (e.g., class, race, gender and creed) with the emphasis on actively engaging people in constructing meanings for planning the future (Watson & Stead, 2006).

From the study it seems that life design counselling had a potentially positive impact on the adolescent. Even though her circumstances and history were not changed by the life design counselling process, she did reveal a 'changed' experience in terms of some aspects in her situation. Co-constructive conversations thus did not necessarily solve her problems, but she did become aware of the meanings she assigns, the motivation for her behaviour and her view of herself. The potential value that is contained in co-constructive conversations seems clear. In attempting to facilitate career adaptability and identity formation, psychologists should view clients as active agents in their own personal development: counselling should persist in addressing the needs and diversity of individual persons.

Endnote

- 1 A subjective identity form is the way a given individual sees him/herself and others in a particular context as well as relates to others and the objects in this context (Savickas et al., 2009).
- 2 A pseudonym is used in the case study.

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