

Career construction with a gay client: a case study

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This article reports on the value of career construction counselling (CCC) with a gay person. The participant was selected purposively, with the selection criteria calling for a mid-career woman who had sought career counselling. The intervention involved administration of the *Career Construction Interview (CCI)* and the creation of a life portrait. A case study design (working with a participant in a one-on-one research setting and incorporating a qualitative, interpretive paradigm) was implemented. The *CCI* (including the three early recollections technique) was administered to gather qualitative data, and Savickas' eight-step strategy was followed to complete the participant's life portrait. After the intervention, the participant demonstrated an enhanced sense of self as well as an increased sense of personal authorship. CCC can thus meet the career counselling needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, and, possibly, also of members of other minority groups.

Keywords: career construction counselling; gay; minority; narrativity; holding environment

Introduction

Any perceived bias towards or unfair treatment of people is bound to cause feelings of resentment, anger and frustration. Discrimination, in whatever form, negatively impacts a person's self-concept in the workplace and de-authorises employees as the authors of their life stories (Savickas, 2011a). Workers from minority groups in general and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals are particularly vulnerable. Datti (2009) contends that the situation has changed somewhat in recent years with LGBT individuals becoming more visible and accepted; yet they still are required to deal with multiple unique challenges including isolation, rejection and an impaired sense of self (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007).

Different lenses have been used in the past to look at ways in which the kind of discrimination outlined above can be dealt with. However, as far as I could establish, nothing has been written about the use of career construction theory (CCT) as a means of examining the idiosyncratic situation of LGBT individuals.

The central thesis of career construction, which lies at the heart of this article, is about authoring one's own career story. Career construction as a specific counselling approach is uniquely positioned to assist clients to feel empowered to author their own career and life stories. Seen from this perspective, the central goal of career construction is to enable

clients to narrate their own stories and to enact them intentionally. The article focuses on a gay woman and on reconciling people's identities and orientations with themselves and the world. In the present study, the *Career Construction Interview (CCI)* was used to elicit the client's career and life story (Savickas, 1998, 2009b). Stated differently, the article is about being who one is and removing the public persona or mask. The issue of workplace discrimination is also touched on as LGBT individuals often feel unfairly treated compared to other employees.

Career construction counselling

Savickas (2013) maintains that CCT explains the interpersonal processes people use to construct themselves and that it directs their vocational behaviour and emphasises the importance of meaning-making in and through their careers. Savickas (2011a) blended the psychodynamic approach with differential and developmental approaches to create an overarching, user-friendly approach to career counselling.

Career construction counselling (CCC) is based largely on the use of objective and subjective approaches to collect data and to enable clients to make well-informed decisions (Hartung, 2011a). Clients have to narrate the multiple mini (smaller) and macro (longer) stories that collectively constitute the evolving grand narrative of their lives so that they can reconnect with their innermost selves. The idea is to construct a 'biographical' bridge between the past and the future. Clients (re)build their sense of self and restore a sense of unity in their multiple stories.

The CCI

The *CCI* (Hartung, 2011a; Savickas, 2011a) was initially called the *Career Style Interview*. Over time, its format changed somewhat, and it then became to be known as the *Career Story Interview*. During the course of the past two years, however, its developer, Mark Savickas (2011a), decided that the name *CCI* was more appropriate. Clients' goals for counselling can be determined by their responses to the opening question (Table 1). Four life story-related questions are then asked to elicit clients' life stories and identify the initial pain (or sometimes pleasure) in their lives, after which their three earliest recollections are obtained.

Career counsellors' aims during CCC

Creating a holding environment

The primary significant others, the home, the school, the tertiary training environment and the workplace typically provide people with holding environments. However, in the twenty-first century, characterised as it is by fundamental change, job insecurity, unemployment and resulting uncertainty, people have to 'hold' themselves and their lives together in the face of escalating discontinuity (Savickas, 2009b). They are expected to become more self-reliant by repeatedly drawing on their own advice from their own life stories, albeit under the watchful eye of the career counsellor. Adler (1932) maintains that early recollections (see below) reflect the stories of clients' lives; stories that they repeat to themselves to soothe, reprimand or 'hold' themselves and that they can draw on to face the future with a 'proven' plan of action.

Table 1. Career Construction Interview (Savickas, 2011a).

Question	Rationale
How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?	Clients are regarded as the sole experts on their lives. Clients need to communicate their goals and set the scene for counselling.
1. Whom did you admire or who were your three role models before you were six years old? Why?	Role models represent clients' self-concepts and central life goals.
2. What is your favourite (a) magazine, (b) TV programme, and (c) website? Why?	Indicates environments that fit clients' lifestyles and that clients prefer (preferred settings for enacting the self)
3. What is your favourite story – book or movie or book turned movie?	Reveals characters who faced the same challenge as the clients and shows how the characters solved the problem.
4. What are your three favourite mottoes or quotations?	Reveals clients' advice to themselves at this moment.
5. What is the first thing you remember about your life? What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recall happening to you before you were six years old.	Early memories reveal core problems clients face; preoccupations.

Facilitating narrativity

Career counselors enable clients to articulate and listen to their career and life stories and to say who they really are. According to Savickas (2009b), people draw on autobiographical reasoning when they make changes in their lives, and they can only really matter to others once they have found and are able to narrate the meaning of their lives.

Encouraging (auto-)biographicity

Clients have to be enabled to draw on their elicited life stories or autobiographies to negotiate repeated transitions (such as leaving school to study at university, starting working and moving from one job or working environment to another) (Savickas, 2009b). Counsellors endeavour to help clients identify their life themes (as revealed by their life stories) so that they can use work to heal themselves. '(Auto)biographicity' also relates to clients' capacity to use their stories to 'hold' themselves when life imposes changes on them.

Creating a sacred space

Clients need a safe or 'sacred space' that is conducive to the narration of their life stories before inviting them to narrate their early recollections. By administering the *CCI* first, a sacred space can be created and the three early recollections (TERs) elicited.

Use of early recollections: theoretical background

The main aim of eliciting early recollections is to determine clients' central preoccupations and life themes. Career counsellors move from assessment to intervention by guiding clients towards repeatedly reflecting on, interpreting and articulating their stories

in coherent, interconnected narratives to inspire and encourage movement (Hartung, 2011a). These unembellished stories are profound and can help counsellors identify clients' central preoccupations and assist clients in actively mastering what they have passively suffered (Savickas, 2011a).

Rationale for the study

Despite some improvement in recent years, discrimination against members of minority groups (including LGBT individuals) is still rife in Africa. Only Mozambique and South Africa offer some form of protection for such individuals (Muthien, 2009). LGBT individuals have consistently reported that sharing their stories with others is too dangerous as in the past it had often led to embarrassment and ostracism. Surprisingly, little has been written on how this situation can be rectified in Africa in particular.

A case study approach based on a qualitative, interpretive paradigm may well shed light on the unique stories of LGBT individuals. More particularly, the *CCI* can be used successfully with such individuals as well as members of other minority groups.

Purpose of the study

This article, and the study it is based on, addresses the following questions:

- (1) How can the *CCI* contribute to changes in the sense of self of a mid-career, gay person?
- (2) How can counsellors use the *CCI* to complete clients' life portraits and thereby help clients assume personal authorship of their career and life stories?

Method

Participant and context

The participant was a purposefully selected 43-year-old white woman (Joan – a pseudonym). The selection criteria called for a minority group member who had indicated a need for career counselling. This case study is reported because of its uniqueness.

Joan had a four-year degree in law. After practising as a legal advisor for a number of years and subsequently lecturing in law, she decided to leave the field of law altogether and start her own business. She believed that she had reached the end of her 'journey as a woman in the legal field'. She continued:

All my expertise was built around my false persona as a woman. I could no longer go on. I decided to start a new life in a new city, far away from where I had been working previously; to begin establishing my true identity – as a man. I felt marginalised because my every effort to do so in my former work environment was treated with scorn.

Joan thus felt trapped in the body of a woman.

Mode of inquiry

The investigation was based on an interpretivist (naturalistic) paradigm, which involves understanding and interpreting clients' responses during interactions with them. The research design was qualitative in nature and comprised a case study.

Data-gathering sources

The *CCI*, including the *TERs*, was completed to elicit Joan's career and life story and also to facilitate the process of career construction (Savickas, 2005) and self-construction (Guichard, 2009). The data so obtained were subsequently used to help craft Joan's self-portrait on the basis of the eight-step sequence designed by Savickas (2011a) and also to elicit Joan's vision and mission statement (*VMS*).

Rigour of the study

Strategies to ensure trustworthiness during the data collection and analysis phases included peer debriefing, participant review, verbatim reporting of the data and avoidance of selective use of the data. I, as the career counsellor, gave feedback to Joan during all phases of the research, and I also asked her to authorise every facet of the intervention.

Career story assessment

Analysing the CCI (Savickas, 2011a). Responses to the questions posed in the *CCI* were analysed along the guidelines proposed by Savickas (2011a) and Hartung (2011a) (see Table 1).

Analysing the TERs (Maree, 2013). The steps below were followed.

- (1) Joan's words were carefully noted and written down.
- (2) The first verb Joan used was noted because it indicates action and how she engaged with the world.
- (3) Repeated words, phrases or expressions were noted because they provide important clues about Joan's life themes.
- (4) After having told her three stories, Joan was requested to imagine that each of these stories would appear in the next day's newspapers and to write a headline containing a verb for each story.
- (5) Feedback started with a discussion of Joan's early recollections ('secrets') with me pointing out that although these recollections might seem superficial, they were replete with meaning and represented Joan's life themes and advice to herself.

Making sure that Joan heard what she had told herself. Joan's own words and expressions were repeated frequently by me. She was prompted to say these words and expressions out loud to make them authentic to her.

Observing Joan. Joan was observed closely, and the observations were written down and later incorporated into the counselling sessions (Savickas, 2009a).

Starting the feedback session. Joan's response to the first question in the *CCI* was considered first in the construction of her life portrait as this response generally gives a clear indication of what a client hopes to achieve with the career counselling.

Creating a life portrait. Savickas' (2011a) eight-step strategy was implemented to compose a life portrait or future scenario for Joan:

Step 1: Carefully considering Joan's response to the first question in the *CCI*.

Step 2: Using Joan's earliest recollections to identify her core problem or preoccupation.

Step 3: Analysing the people Joan admired most (what they represented to her).

Step 4: Analysing Joan's favourite magazine, TV programme and website to determine the settings or environments that best fit her lifestyle.

Step 5: Analysing Joan's favourite story to determine whether it contained a character with a problem similar to hers and how the character solved the particular problem.

Step 6: Asking Joan to draw on her three favourite mottoes or quotations to find advice she could give herself to 'heal herself'.

Step 7: Considering fields of study and occupations that might be appropriate for Joan.

Step 8: Asking Joan to write a response to her original request for career counselling.

Using a metaphor to wrap up the CCI. I wrapped up the counselling sessions with a metaphor that Joan herself had used during the interview.

Procedure

The intervention comprised six sessions. The CCI was completed during the first (60 minutes) session. In Session 2 (which lasted 120 minutes), Joan's career story was read back to her for her authorisation. Joan's life portrait was co-constructed with her, and action steps were decided upon (see the Results section). Since Joan lives 1200 km from me (the counsellor), a further four telephonic sessions (each lasting 1 hour) were conducted. Psychiatric review and counselling overlapped during the last four sessions.

Ethical issues

Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality maintained. Written permission was given for the anonymous publication of the case study.

Limitations and caveats

My subjective interpretation of the data could be seen as a limitation. I have always been sympathetic towards marginalised individuals and individuals from minority groups. I myself was regarded as an 'outsider' largely because I grew up as the child of an English-speaking (Catholic) mother of Lebanese origin and an Afrikaans (Protestant) father in an exclusively Afrikaans environment at the height of apartheid. Also, I grew up as a member of a poor family in an impoverished, rural environment and saw the suffering of indigent, disadvantaged people.

Other caveats include the following: First, successful implementation of the eight-step strategy is dependent on the professional training of career counsellors in the narrative tradition and theory. Second, the creation of a 'sacred space' (Savickas, 1998) where the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client can be built and is essential for the success of the strategy.

Responses to questions in the CCI

- (a) In response to the question, 'How can I be useful to you?', Joan responded (Savickas, 2011a)¹:

I believe I need guidance to optimise my own abilities. (TURNS HER HEAD, SCRATCHES HER MOUTH, LOOKS AROUND) I can consider qualifying to start a

career as a life coach. I love working with people. Do realise, though, that I will have to start de novo.

I really want to write. Do know that I will not find work in the legal environment. I completed my B.A. Law (LLB) degree because ‘testing’ at university suggested that (SMILES IRONICALLY) I wanted to do teaching and thus included psychology in my degree.

Currently I am generating an income with what my partner and I have. Not a suitable long-term proposition. We will be able to make ends meet over the next three to four years while my partner’s son is studying. I have three to four years to prepare myself for something viable in the long term.

(1) Role models.

A male family friend. When first he asked me for my name, I said ‘Phillip’. He subsequently always referred to me as Phillip, until his day of death. Tall, strong, intelligent, strict (stood up for what was ‘right’), yet, underneath a tender man with a soft heart when it mattered. A no-nonsense kind of person. I always wanted to be like him. A very, very hard worker, he achieved great success in the business world.

A long-time acquaintance. Uses time optimally. He has mastered the art of finding harmony between thoughts and emotions. Gentle person with a gentle way of holding his own.

My partner’s father.² I revere his fantastic memory, adaptability and ability to listen and to lead. His sense of what is right and what is wrong and dedication.

(2) Favourite magazine, television show and website.

(SIGHS HEAVILY)

Cosmopolitan. I love the articles’ life coach slant; helping people optimise their potential. Reading it stimulates me to note and test my own against other opinions. I also like DIY. I am good with my hands.

Reality programmes. They are real; not fiction or fake.

Google. Growing up in the Christian tradition often results in a blinkered view on religion and related matters. Who can prove anything? Every perspective develops relative to how one grew up.

(3) Favourite book or movie.

(SIGHS)

Looking on darkness. The book concerns the notion of standing or falling by one’s beliefs about love, irrespective of whether it is “right” or “wrong” or “acceptable” from others’ perspective. The main character, Joseph, is resilient, determined, willing to dare and honest. He rebels against the prescribed norms and eventually sacrifices his love to make people aware of the often dubious nature of prescribed norms. Headstrong, somewhat inflexible, and knowing that he would be hurt in the process, Joseph nevertheless stepped on toes and bumped his head to prove his point.

(4) Favourite sayings or mottoes.

One has to know one's own limitations.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself – not more.

Only one's own wisdom unlocks ultimate redemption. You alone will stand before the Judge.

(5) Three early recollections.

(a) *Infant seeks freedom of choice:*

This happened in a small town when I was three. My uncle and aunt, who were visiting us, took me to the only shop in town. Wanting to spoil me, my uncle took me to the girlie section to find something to buy for me. Upon being asked by him what it was that I wanted, I took him by the hand, straight to the male clothing department, saying he could choose something on my behalf. As long as it was shorts and a shirt. Back in the safety of the car I asked my aunt if I could change into my new clothes. She said I could.

(b) *Teenager's ambition mystifies peer group:*

In Grade 8, our teacher asked our class what we wanted to become after school. My answer was honest (SPEAKS ALMOST INAUDIBLY): I just want to serve others. I don't know why I said that. It shocked me to observe that our class had no idea what I was talking about.

(c) Toddler endures brother's potty 'humour'

I was three when this happened.

(WIPES SOMETHING FROM THE TABLE)

My older brother and I were at home with the domestic worker. My potty training was nearly over. My brother, wanting to make a joke with the domestic worker, convinced me to let him throw three large torch batteries into my nappy. I remember wallowing under their weight. My brother kept on pulling faces as if he smelt something very bad while leading me to the kitchen, telling our domestic worker to check and see how severely I had soiled myself. He laughed so hard that I had to laugh, too

Constructing a life portrait for Joan

Joan and I subsequently constructed the following life portrait for her (Savickas, 2011a). Although I initially constructed the life portrait, we worked together to co-construct this portrait towards further shaping her life-career story.

In Step 1, Joan's response to the first question in the *CCI* was carefully considered as this response generally gives a clear indication of a client's goals in respect of career counselling. Joan's response (and the disappointment she expressed about her working environment) reveals her current problem as well as her plan for solving the problem. She is at a crossroads, seeking guidance to strengthen her sense of self: 'optimise my own abilities'. She believes her and her partner's future is uncertain and could be jeopardised by a number of factors related to financial and emotional insecurity. She has a number of broad career options but wants first to find a way to ensure a long-term relationship with her current partner.

In Step 2, Joan's earliest recollections were used to identify her core problem or preoccupation. (Joan's own reflections on her stories are given in inverted commas.)

Joan's *first memory* is of an uncle who offered her an opportunity to decide for herself on her preferred gender identity). She finds herself in a situation where she is expected to conform to societal norms and make a 'normative choice' that does not correspond with her feelings (*a central life problem*). She now, however, expects society to respect her choice. She is no longer willing to give in to pressure and to make a choice that is inconsistent with her innermost inclinations: 'I don't care what people think or do any longer. I will do everything within my power to preserve and protect my partner's and my own happiness'. Moreover, her partner had recently indicated that she was interested in a relationship with Joan *as a man*. To cement the relationship and realise her life-long ambition to become a man, Joan was considering a number of steps to augment her male persona.

Joan's first verb is 'visiting'. Joan stated that her life had always been the life of a 'visitor' to a country with no permanent status. No approval or acceptance. No warmth. Constant rejection. 'I am so tired of having to pretend that I am not who I really am'. (CRIES BITTERLY) 'It is so unfair'. Participating in the 'real world' is impossible. Forward movement is impeded at all levels, personally and professionally. Yet, her advice to herself is to acquire 'permanent residence' in an inhospitable world. While Joan narrated these stories, I repeated certain key phrases and asked Joan to clarify the meaning of the key words and expressions she used. Care was thus taken to ensure that she listened to herself carefully and actually heard herself saying what she was trying to say. Narrativity was accordingly facilitated.

Reflecting on the second story, Joan commented as follows: (STARES AT SOME INVISIBLE OBJECT) 'I was always misunderstood. Whereas I knew then that my value system far exceeded the value system of my peers, there was no recognition of my sincerity; of my right to have an opinion on important matters'.

(SIGHS) 'Everything was in order as long as I was prepared to betray myself'.

(SIGHS, LOOKS UP) 'But that was then. Listening to myself now convinces me to tackle the status quo'.

Joan draws on her own story for advice. She has arrived at a definitive crossroads in her life. Tolerating abuse and rejection did not work in the past; she may as well change the direction of her life drastically. It is a gamble, but one well worth taking. Her *second story* thus confirms her view that the time has come for her to 'start moving'; to turn intention into real action.

Joan appeared initially reluctant to reflect on her *third story*, commenting as follows: 'I have an idea my brother was trying to teach me to see the humorous side of humiliating circumstances'

(BITES HER LIP, TAPS ON THE TABLE, SIGHS)

Previously I did not recognise (or, rather, acknowledge) that the humour was at my expense. I am battling to admit that was actually the case. Because that would reflect negatively on my brother. And I do not want to hurt him.

I hate admitting this but I know my brother was actually poking fun at me. I epitomise kindness and I allowed and still allow people to humiliate me ... even those closest to me ... under the pretext of trying to 'normalise' and defuse uncomfortable and potentially explosive situations.

Just as I determined the pace of my potty training, I can choose not to allow people to humiliate me. I sometimes smilingly allowed myself to be sacrificed as a circus animal. This will no longer be the case. Thank God.

Joan now realises that she can choose whether to allow others to humiliate her. She intends to be honest with herself. This gives her hope for the future, built on a course of action that will allow her to be what and who she is and has always been. She can now choose to 'remove the unnecessary weight from [my] nappy' and embark on a course of action to heal herself.

In Step 3, the people Joan admired or admires most (more accurately, what they represent to Joan) were analysed to determine her self-concept, central life goals and proposed solutions to her central life problems. Joan's role models share a number of common characteristics. They confirm her *central life goal* and her envisaged solution to her central life problem. She wants to be strong, wise, work hard and achieve success in the world of business. She displays a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong and wants to do things 'right' and use her time optimally. She also wants to harmonise her thoughts and emotions (*another central life goal*), develop herself further and become more adaptable (*another central life goal*).

In Step 4, Joan's favourite magazine, TV programme and website were analysed to determine the settings or environments that best fit her lifestyle. She wants to help people realise their potential and seeks an occupational environment where she can test her opinions against other opinions. She also wants to develop her technical skills and her ability to investigate matters.

Joan questions many of the restrictions her traditional beliefs have imposed on her. She believes that most of the significant others in her life have a blinkered understanding of religion and related issues and that people should be tolerant and accepting of the views of others.

She likes reality programmes because they do not hide the truth of what is happening. She is tired of having to pretend that things in her life are different to what they really are. In the interview, she often referred to her love for gardening and doing things with her hands: 'I am myself when I work in a garden or do anything practical, such as installing shelves. And I love avantgarde music'.

In Step 5, Joan's favourite story was analysed to determine whether it contained a character with a problem similar to hers and how the character solved the particular problem. *Looking on darkness* is the story of a man prepared to stand or fall by his beliefs about love, irrespective of whether or not his view of love is shared by others. Just like the main character, Joseph, Joan is resilient, determined, willing to dare and honest. She, too, rebels against the norms of her day.

In Step 6, Joan drew on her three favourite mottoes or quotations to find advice she could give herself on how to 'heal herself'. She realised that it was up to her to take the steps needed to change her circumstances and that it was not important what others, who did not have her best interests at heart, believed. She alone would one day face her Maker. She could choose to be happy, and she needed to love others only as much as she loved herself.

Step 7 covered fields of study and occupations that might be appropriate ('fitting') for Joan. Recommended fields for investigation were an Honours degree in Industrial or Educational Psychology, short courses in, for example, hospitality management, carpentry, electrical engineering, metals and welding, radio and TV broadcasting, journalism and landscaping.

In the last step, Joan was asked to write a response to her original request for career counselling. She confirmed that she was hoping for more than 'ordinary' career counselling. She also confirmed her disillusionment: 'First, I wondered if I was

“different” to other children. Later on I knew I WAS. I like women because I experience myself as male in my whole being’.

‘Fitting into a peer group was always a major challenge. I always had to find the right masks to fit in and not be rejected. Finding the right mask not to shock my mother was particularly problematic’ (TEARS WELLED UP IN HER EYES).

‘I chose not to do my best at school from Grade 10 onwards. I just didn’t want to stand out from the group’.

Joan’s life portrait

I am experiencing mixed emotions currently. I feel disillusioned, angry, unhappy, disappointed but I am also experiencing a sense of hope, cleansing, relief and excitement. I realise that I have as much a right as all others to decide who I am, who I want to become, and to be respected. I feel wounded by significant others who show scant regard for me, either refusing to accept who I am or declaring themselves willing to accept me conditionally only.

I am tired of hiding behind masks; having to live with choices that were made on my behalf. I want to exercise my right to freedom of choice; to be what and who I have always wanted to be; to become more adaptable so I can deal with the limitations life has imposed upon me. I intend to see what my chances are of finding a surgeon with sufficient empathy and the needed skills to help me become a man.

I am beginning to see the new seeds in my garden sprouting. Hurt is turning into hope. I will no longer allow myself to be the butt of people’s misguided attempts to make me look ridiculous. I am eager to introduce the real me to the world. The time has come to start moving. I am determined to become who I really am, to find a career that I can fit into my life, to heal myself and, in doing so, become enabled to help others who have been betrayed and suffered injustices become healthy, too.

I subsequently asked Joan to compose her VMS, and this is what she wrote:

I will be happy when I become the man I want to be, physically, emotionally, and career-wise and provide for my partner and myself. I want to be a role model to others who have suffered the way I did.

I then assembled phrases from Joan’s *CCI* into the following identity narrative, which encapsulates the essence of her career story and reflects her future movement:

I will be happy and successful when I drop the mask I have been wearing for too long; physically become who I have always wanted to be; find a job or combination of jobs that will help me become a brilliant businessperson. My legal background will help me ensure that fairness prevails for marginalised people in particular ... and that includes my partner and me’.

I used this VMS to identify the resources Joan needed to design feasible action strategies to realise her stated aims. Job analysis could include visits to educational institutions/ employers, discussions with occupational practitioners, part-time work, *work shadowing* and Internet surfing.

Joan was referred to a psychiatrist and surgeon for psychiatric and medical examination to determine her suitability for a gender reassignment operation. A clinical psychologist was recommended for counselling on her tendency to neglect herself while attending to the needs of others. Counselling on emotional-social skills acquisition

(including guidance on how to become more adaptive) and on her tendency to act impulsively were also recommended. These multifaceted inputs will no doubt have had a bearing on the outcomes achieved in this case study and are acknowledged.

When asked to comment on how she had experienced the career counselling session, she replied:

I was hoping for career counselling. Instead I have discovered myself. For the first time ever, the true Joan was allowed to speak. I could listen to and hear myself. I have to heal myself first and now is the time.

Having experienced a secure holding environment, she can now work towards healing herself and providing holding environments for others (Winnicott, 1969). In collaboration with medical and psychological professionals, Joan can begin to piece together the missing parts of her career story.

Wrapping up the sessions, I told Joan that she reminded me of the theme (protesting against the mistreatment of members of minority groups) of the Woody Guthrie song *Deportee*, and I continued by saying to her:

I feel I am in the presence of a deeply caring human being. It is almost as if I am about to listen to a DVD produced by an avantgarde artist like Woody Guthrie. I am inspired by your selfless willingness to challenge unfair practice, to stand up for the rights of broken people.

(JOAN CRIES SOFTLY, SIGHS HEAVILY, AND SPEAKS SOFTLY) ‘Trying to fit into our kind of norm-orientated society is not an easy stroll in the park’.

I was so tired. But I know what to do. More importantly, I feel free.

In response to my question: ‘Have I been useful to you during these sessions?’, Joan replied:

You have facilitated my opportunity to really live; to be true to myself; to speak to myself; to listen and hear what I have to say to myself. Everyone carries within himself his own blueprint of how he is supposed to develop. That blueprint must be discovered. You gave me the required key; the most glorious gift ever. I will be eternally grateful to you.

I then requested Joan to return home and consider possible options for dealing with the challenges confronting her and report back to me if she wanted to.

Follow-up session

Four months after the initial sessions, Joan reported back to me as follows:

I have consulted medical practitioners and the first of two essential surgical procedures has just been completed. I will consult an endocrinologist and a specialist about a psychiatric examination regarding the transgender and any other matter soonest. I am who I am. I am still somewhat unsure about exactly what career I will build but it is more important now to become the person I need to be. Life unfolds precisely as it should. What more do we have than our own wisdom to redeem ourselves?

One month later, Joan wrote:

I now realise that choosing my career years ago was of secondary importance. Other aspects of my life are far more important. My career did not add real meaning to my life. One's career forms a big part of your life and should be an extension of who you are, reflecting your true identity. How can anyone be successful if you do something that refutes your true identity? It is so sad that the archaic career counselling that I received at a crucial juncture in my life, while supposedly determining my aptitude and personality, ignored who I really was; the role I really wished to play in life; in other words, the essence of my life story.

Recommendations

First, career counsellors should receive training in the use of the *CCI*. Second, all prospective career counsellors, and, in fact, all healthcare professionals should be trained in the basics of discrimination prevention against and management of LGBT individuals and members of other minority groups. Third, these professionals should receive training in basic therapeutic techniques aimed at providing holding environments for the victims of discrimination.

Conclusion

The usefulness of CCC theory and practice (Hartung, 2011a, 2011b; Savickas, 2011b) is shown by the readiness of the participant in the case study to make important choices in and changes to her life. The findings of this study suggest that the application of CCT (Savickas, 2005) as seen in the *CCI* is a strategy that can help clients in general and people from minority groups in particular (in this case, a gay person) deal with personal and work-related trauma and accept authorship of their career and life stories (Savickas et al., 2009). Their narratability will promote continuity in their life stories, help them understand themselves better, help them become more comfortable with who they are (their identity) and help them engage with the world more adaptively. The case study demonstrates how clients can be guided to regain self-respect and hope by identifying and actualise major (central) life themes. In the process, their weaknesses are turned into strengths, self-healing is promoted and they are enabled to make social contributions through their work.

The case study also demonstrates how the *CCI* can help clients write life portraits and how it is a viable theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding the unique experiences of LGBT individuals in career-related contexts. The career counselling theory and practice (strategy and methods) shown here can be used effectively to help clients construct, deconstruct, reconstruct and co-construct their lives and (re)write their life stories in collaboration with empathetic career counsellors. In this particular case study, the significant impact of the professional interventions of the psychiatrist, counsellor and clinical psychologist on the client's progress should also not be lost sight of.

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I would like to thank the client for participating in the study.

Notes

1. The verbatim responses of the participant have been only lightly edited to preserve the authenticity of her responses.
2. An adult role model. Joan was not willing to replace her adult role model with an early role model.

Notes on contributor

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