Connecting conscious knowledge with subconscious advice through career construction counselling to resolve career choice indecision

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In this article I report on how conscious knowledge could be connected with subconscious advice through career construction counselling to resolve the career choice indecision of a postgraduate psychology student. The participant was purposively selected from a number of people attending a course in narrative career counselling. An explanatory, single case study design was adopted, and a qualitative approach was employed as the research framework. A career construction counselling intervention was used to generate data that was analysed according to the analytic style recommended by Savickas. The findings demonstrate the value of this kind of intervention in enabling the participant to reflect critically on key facets of his career-life story. Doing so revealed the difference between his conscious view of a possible future career-life trajectory and his subconsciously regulated perspective on that trajectory. The findings also reveal the value of career construction counselling in helping the participant proceed from functioning as a social actor displaying motivated agency to furthering his career-life story as an autobiographical author. Future research should focus on larger groups of participants and include different assessment instruments to examine the longitudinal influence of the intervention described here, in group contexts with diverse groups of young people.

Keywords: career choice indecision; career construction counselling; career construction interview; career interest profile; connecting conscious knowledge with subconscious advice

Introduction

Most learners and workers in the 21st century are experiencing increased career decision-making pressure because of the many changes in the world of work – changes that are making them rethink their career-lives, including whether jobs will disappear or be changed to such an extent by Work 4.0 developments that they will no longer fit into these careers or meet the new demands posed by changing work environments (Urbanaviciute, Udayar & Rossier, 2019). We, as career counselling theorists, researchers, and practitioners, need to respond to these changes in a timely and appropriate manner to ensure that what we do remains relevant and continues to meet people's career counselling needs.

Education and training issues such as changing schools, dropping subjects in favour of other subjects, and changing fields of study are common in people's academic lives (Maree, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). These changes are made for a variety of reasons. For example, many learners struggle to achieve good marks in certain subjects (e.g. mathematics) and consequently take a less difficult subject. However, they later learn that they need a good mark in mathematics to qualify for sought-after fields of study such as engineering and then have to drop the easier subject and start again with mathematics. Other learners receive career counselling only to discover that they are in an inappropriate field of study and then have to change their study field. Still other learners enter careers that leave them frustrated and unfulfilled, causing them to seek career counselling to help them decide on more appropriate careers.

Gati, Gadassi, Saka, Hadadi, Ansenberg, Friedmann and Asulin-Perez (2011), Kelly and Lee (2002), and Maree (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) agree that career decision difficulties should be addressed and dealt with as early as possible in the career decision-making process. Gati et al. (2011) maintain that "[m]ost young adults report facing difficulties in making career decisions; indeed, many approach career counselors to get help in making these decisions" (p. 4). They add that "[s]ome of these deliberating individuals have only temporary or developmental career decision-making difficulties, considered a normative phase in vocational development; these individuals are typically labelled as undecided" (p. 4). I agree with this view, which is the lens through which this article should be read and interpreted.

Psychology of Career Choice Decision Making
Points of transition and changing career decisions
The reasons for changing career decisions can be grouped into five broad categories.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, many learners experience career decision-making insecurity at natural points of transition or crossroads during their academic careers. This includes transitioning from one school to another (where they may not be able to study all their chosen subjects), from one school phase to another (and having to choose between subjects), at the point of completing their school years (and having to decide on a future career and field of study), and at the point of completing their tertiary studies (and having to find employment).

A second group of learners receives or stumbles on (serendipitously or through happenstance, cf. Krumboltz, 2003) additional information about the world of work and begin to question their chosen subjects, schools, fields of study, and tertiary training institutions.

A third group of learners discovers more about themselves and their traits and begin to doubt whether they will fit into their chosen field of study.

A fourth group of learners matures naturally, becomes more motivated to study and achieve better marks, and discovers that they are capable of constructing themselves and their careers at higher levels.

A fifth group of learners is helped by skilled career construction counsellors to uncover key life themes (e.g. a desire to fight for the rights of people or heal the sick) and to consider entering different fields of study that may be better suited to fulfilling these key life themes.

Different kinds of career indecision difficulties
A brief overview of earlier research on career decision-making difficulties suggests that a distinction can be drawn between the following five kinds of such difficulties (Career indecision, n.d.; Gati & Asher, 2001; Kelly & Lee, 2002): i) a lack of and need for career choice information; ii) identity diffusion (an inadequate sense of self); iii) trait indecision (inability to make career-choice decisions); iv) choice anxiety (anxiety regarding career choices); and v) disagreement with others (observing objectively and/or subjectively that significant others disagree with or disapprove of their career choices).

These authors argue also that two different kinds of career indecision (each requiring its own kind of intervention) can be distinguished. The first group includes people with "developmental" indecision who need basic information (such as the differences between a university and a university of technology) as well as psychoeducational and psychosocial information. For this group, brief career counselling (when specific career-choice information is provided) should be sufficient. The second group includes people with long-lasting indecisiveness who often exhibit emotional problems relating to, among other things, anxiety, insecurity, inadequate self-efficacy, or a poor (underdeveloped) sense of self and identity. These people require career counselling embedded in life design.

Distinction between career indecisiveness and career indecision
Some authors, including Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz and Gati (2013), argue in favour of a further distinction between career indecisiveness and career indecision. They believe that career indecisiveness is indicative of general indecisiveness regarding anxiety and problem-solving challenges and that career indecision is negatively correlated with people's emotional-social intelligence (revealed by, for instance, their ability to be in touch with their emotions and the emotions of others, to manage stress, and to be generally optimis-

tic). These authors maintain that most people experience career indecision as they negotiate the process of choosing subjects, schools, fields of study, careers, and jobs. Consequently, different interventions are needed to deal with the phenomena of career indecision and career indecisiveness. Gianakos' (1999) research, for example, revealed that career decision self-efficacy improved his student participants' decision-making ability and, simultaneously, decreased their career indecision.

In similar vein, Guay, Senécal, Gauthier and Fernet (2003) contend, on the basis of career indecision as defined in self-determination theory, that sound interpersonal relationships between college students and their parents and friends can influence their career indecision positively, and vice versa. The authors found that the behaviour of parents who displayed controlling behaviour correlated strongly negatively with their children's self-efficacy and decision-making independence. Likewise, Garcia, Restubog, Toledano, Tolentino and Rafferty (2012) found that the desire to become highly skilful correlated strongly negatively with measured career indecision. In summary, factors such as adequate self-efficacy levels, emotional-social intelligence, a positive attitude, intentionality (Maree, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), and self-sufficiency seemingly correlate strongly positively with decreased career indecision. In seeking ways to deal with career indecision, these and other related factors should always be borne in mind. The above findings have theoretical as well as counselling implications in that they can enhance our attempts to deal with people's career decision-making challenges by helping us come up with the best coping strategies for them.

In this article I examine the participant's career decision-making needs through the lens of career construction theory (Savickas, 2019). Since numerous books, book chapters, and scholarly articles have been written on career construction theory, I will here only briefly discuss the key characteristics of this theory.

Career Construction Theory
Career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2015a, 2015b, 2019) brings together seemingly divergent theoretical career counselling traditions. Firstly, CCT draws on the differential approach (Holland, 1997) by using tests that help counsellors and clients identify key differences between people as well as key similarities between their individual profiles and the characteristics of certain jobs. The aim is to find an optimal match between people's personality traits and particular work environments. Secondly, CCT brings the developmental tradition (Super, 1957) into play by applying educational strategies to help people adapt. This approach emphasises the numerous roles people play in their lives and also the different life stages they go

through. According to Savickas (2019:10), "to complement the matching model's focus on the content of career choices, Super (1957) applied the life-cycle paradigm to psychosocial education about the process of coping with a progressive sequence of career stages and developmental tasks." Super (1957) stresses the importance of assisting people to choose and adapt to careers instead of focusing merely on possible work-related choices. Savickas (2019) explains that career counsellors who use the life-cycle model implement career development education methods to help people (a) visualise their future to help them plan for it, (b) become aware of impending developmental tasks, and (c) actively rehearse those attitudes, beliefs, and competencies (ABCs) that they need to execute those tasks. Savickas (2005) formalised and linked these ABCs to adaptability in relation to its four dimensions: career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. Enhancing learners' career adaptability by following the above career development education approach can yield beneficial outcomes (Hartung, 2013; Hartung & Santilli, 2018; Maree, 2018; Savickas, 2019).

Thirdly, CCT draws on the psychodynamic (narrative or storied tradition) (Freud, 1963). A key component of this approach is the eliciting of people's numerous micro-stories (thereby promoting their narratability) and then helping them reflect on these stories (their autobiographies) to identify their key life themes. Events in people's early lives often become part of their subconscious and can powerfully affect their career-life stories and influence their conscious cognitions and actions (including their career-related motivations and choices and the executions of these choices). A carefully selected number of the micro-, meso-, and macro-stories that collectively constitute people's career-life stories therefore need to be elicited. People can then be assisted by career counsellors skilled in the narrative approach to make meaning of these stories. For this to happen, it is important to draw on what is referred to as (auto)biographical reasoning. This kind of reasoning starts with the examination of early career-life stories and locating them in educational-social contexts. Thus, conscious knowledge (what people know consciously) is connected with subconscious advice through career construction counselling to resolve career-choice indecision. The result is that their sense of self and identity are bolstered.

Ultimately, "[w]hat is at stake in a task is never just an outer achievement such as graduating from university, but a personal theme in need of resolution, clarification, or enhancement" (Cochran, 1992:189). Eliciting such a theme is possible when counsellors adopt a not-knowing approach that enables them to listen **for** people's stories instead of listening **to** their stories (Savickas, 2016; Welty, 1998).

Rationale for the Study
Narrative, subjective, or qualitative career counselling approaches (and associated techniques) have received global recognition over the past few decades – not merely as an add on to using quantitative strategies in career counselling but as equally (if not more) effective and useful than traditional quantitative approaches (Maree, 2018). Research conducted globally confirms the effectiveness of career construction counselling intervention in resolving career indecision in general. More specifically, it has been shown that enhanced career decision skills often correlate positively with enhanced meaning making in people's careers and with people acquiring a sense of purpose and hope in their work lives (Maree, 2017b). However, research on the influence of career construction intervention on the career indecision of disadvantaged students (black students in particular) has received scant attention. The situation (especially in Africa) is a matter of concern to those of us who conduct career counselling research and practise career counselling here and have witnessed its value in other contexts. I believe that this case study on the implementation of career construction counselling with a disadvantaged black student experiencing career indecision can shed light on the value of this kind of approach for people from different cultures and can contribute to the debate on the topic.

Goals of the Study
The goal of this study was to establish the influence of career construction counselling (based on co-constructive conversations) on the career choice indecision of a master's degree student in psychology. The following specific research questions guided the research.
a) How did the participant experience the career construction counselling?
b) What was the influence of the intervention on the participant's career indecision?
c) What changes did the intervention bring about in the participant?
d) What factors prompted these changes?

Method
Participant and Context
The participant was a conveniently selected 27-year-old Zulu-speaking man who had received his education in English and who had requested career construction counselling (one of the selection criteria). With other participants, Lionel (pseudonym; at the time of the study, a master's degree student in counselling psychology) had volunteered to play the role of client in a live demonstration of career construction counselling. The demonstration was part of a course in narrative career counselling in 2018. Prior to the demonstration, the students were requested to write their names on pieces of paper, which were then put into a hat from which one name was randomly drawn. This sampling style can

be described as convenience sampling with an element of randomness. After the demonstration, three of the attendees were invited to thank the participant and say what her or his story had meant to them. All the students were reminded about the ethical aspects of such a demonstration, for example, they were reminded that the demonstration could under no circumstances be discussed outside the course venue (the principle of privacy).

Procedure

The intervention took place in Pretoria. During the first (elicitation) phase, the Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas, 2019) was administered (lasting about 65 minutes). However, since the information obtained from the CCI did not yield sufficient information to proceed with Phase 2 of the intervention, the CCI was followed by the administration of the Career Interest Profile (CIP) (Maree, 2017a) (lasting about 70 minutes). The following morning, during the authorisation phase, Lionel and I analysed the outcomes of the intervention together.

After a 30-minute break, we entered into the third phase (devising action steps to facilitate forward movement) and delved into Lionel's reasons for consulting me (this phase lasted about 120 minutes). We commenced by examining the outlines of his career-life story and connecting the dots that emerged. This enabled us to identify ways to deal with his career choice indecision by investigating the gap between what he knew and understood consciously and what he could access subconsciously (advice), devise possible strategies, and draw up a road map or course of action to help him move forward.

Mode of Inquiry

The research described in this article was a naturalistic inquiry (meaning that the participant was studied in a natural (real-life) context) situated in a qualitative (interpretive) paradigm and involving the nonexperimental implementation of qualitative assessment and intervention. An explorative, descriptive, intrinsic, individual case study design was implemented in a one-on-one research setting. Consequently, the data generation instruments (see below) were purposively selected to promote critical self-reflection and reflexivity. Reflection comprises thinking about one's past – including one's earliest memories, experiences, and cognitions – in an attempt to connect one's past with one's present. Reflexivity, on the other hand, comprises thought or cognitive processes that include vigorous self-conscious assessment of conscious knowledge aimed at uncovering more psychologically healthy ways of constructing oneself (Guichard, 2009) and one's career in the future (Savickas, 2015a, 2015b). The latter aim is potentiated by connecting the past, the present, and the future prospectively.

Data-generating Instruments
The Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas, 2019)
The CCI is used to help people better understand themselves and elicits their subjective life-career themes (Hartung, 2011). It also challenges people to tell stories that reveal who they are and aspire to become. Besides its first question ("How can I be useful to you?"), the CCI also contains the following questions: i. Whom did you admire when you were young? ii. What is your favourite a) magazine, b) television (TV) programme, and c) website? iii. What is your favourite book or movie? iv. What are your three favourite quotations? and v. What are your three earliest recollections?

The Career Interest Profile (CIP, Version 6) (Maree, 2017a)
The CIP is used to elicit career story information qualitatively (Table 1) in order to generate qualitative data. The CIP is grounded in career construction theory (Savickas, 2019), self-construction theory (Guichard, 2009), career style assessment and counselling (Adler, 1958), narrative career counselling theory and practice (Cochran, 1997), and Erikson's (1968) self-concept and psychosocial development theory. The CIP questions are used to elicit information that relates to the differential, developmental, and psychodynamic (storied) traditions. The small quantitative part of the CIP (Part 2) has demonstrated satisfactory test-retest reliability and content and criterion-related validity (Maree & Sommerville, 2008). It can be administered individually and in groups. Carefully and purposefully structured, the CIP questions promote reflection and, ultimately, reflexivity to develop the processes of narratability and biographicity, and to facilitate the clarification and construction of career-life stories (Maree, 2013).

Table 1 Description of the CIP (Maree, 2017a)

Part	Information elicited relates to …		Associated processes (Savickas, 2011, 2015b, 2019)		Paradigm (Savickas, 2015b)	
1.	1a	biographical details, family influences, and initial career-related indicators (four questions and sub-questions)	1b	Guiding, advising	1c	Career development
2.	2a	qualitative career choice-related indicators (four questions and sub-questions)	2b	Guiding, advising	2c	Vocational guidance
3.	3a	the six most and the six least preferred career category preferences (from a list of 19)	3b	Educating, facilitating	3c	Vocational guidance/ Career development
4.	4a	small or micro career-life story narratives (14 questions and sub-questions)	4b	Designing, healing	4c	Life designing

Rigour of the Study

Crystallisation (Richardson, 2000) was used to promote trustworthiness and enhance the rigour of the study. Richardson (2000) argues that the post-modern construct of crystallisation (broadly speaking, the use of different qualitative assessment modes and techniques in research) "provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic" (p. 934). Stewart, Gapp and Harwood (2017) explain that "[t]he qualitative method of the interpretivist epistemologist employs crystallization to seek out appropriate and ethically ratified pieces of the puzzle or quilt with the ultimate aim of answering the research question/s" (p. 6). Peer debriefing includes discussing the findings with an experienced colleague. The participant was requested to review and reflect on matters related to the research during all phases of the intervention to enhance respondent validation, and responses were reported verbatim where possible. In addition, the data was not used selectively. As the researcher/career counsellor, I asked the participant to authorise (or, in the event of his disagreeing with my understanding of what had happened, de-authorise) all aspects of the intervention.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data

I used Savickas' (2019) guidelines to analyse the kind of data generated by the intervention (see below) and also considered Merrill and West's (2009) biographical research data analysis approach. Firstly, I asked the participant repeatedly to reflect critically on and interpret his own reflections (his responses to questions). Meta-reflection was thus promoted. Secondly, repeated words, expressions, and phrases were shared with Lionel and we jointly attempted to identify patterns from them. This bolstered reflexivity, which, in turn, advanced narratability and biographicity and promoted clarification and co-construction of Lionel's career-life stories (Maree, 2013; ML Savickas, pers. comm.). Thirdly, I read Lionel's words and expressions out to him verbatim so that he could listen to and hear himself and feel in control of the assessment situation. In the fourth place, we began by discussing his three earliest recollections and his responses to the three hurtful experiences to uncover his key career-life themes. Next we carefully worked our way through the rest of the questions (in the order presented in the Outcomes section). Although Lionel and I reflected on his answers together, I took care to highlight certain key themes that emerged from the answers. Lastly, we attempted to find a link between a) Lionel's integrated elicited themes (subconscious motivations and strivings) and b) his responses to Part 2 of the CIP (his conscious insights) in relation to his reason for seeking career counselling.

Ethical Issues

I did all I could to ensure Lionel's well-being throughout the intervention, including confirming his right to withdraw at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained from him, and confidentiality was guaranteed and maintained. As career counsellor I adopted the roles of facilitator, instrument, and confidant. As recommended by Hay-Smith, Brown, Anderson and Treharne (2016), I endeavoured to separate my roles of researcher and practitioner by planning and implementing a number of strategies to deal with possible ethical and methodological problems in the intervention. My relationship with Lionel remained open, honest, and compassionate throughout the intervention. I took trouble to clarify all aspects of the intervention with him and was aware throughout that he might consciously (or even subconsciously) have attempted to provide pleasing responses (i.e. correct or appropriate responses) and bore this in mind during the data analysis (Sieck, 2012). I accordingly repeatedly invited him to explain or clarify his responses to my questions. The research was approved by the Ethics Review Board of the University of Pretoria.

Outcomes

Outcomes of the quantitative part of the assessment

According to Part 2 of the CIP, Lionel's preferred careers were psychologist ("*I like working with people; their behaviour fascinates me*"), professional athlete ("*I like their lifestyle, routine, the money, and other benefits they receive*"), coach ("*I like coaching young athletes towards the goals they aspire to*"), team manager ("*I would love to travel with teams to far-away places, watch their matches, and see many places*"), and business manager ("*I would like to eventually manage and run my own franchise*").

Outcomes of the qualitative part of the assessment

Before commencing the intervention, I explained briefly to Lionel that we would be eliciting a number of his micro (smaller) career-life stories that would be analysed afterwards in search of patterns that might indicate (advice to himself) his reason for seeking career counselling. I also said that, theoretically, his stories could contain guidance regarding the decisions he needed to take (Reid, 2018). Stated differently, we would be examining his subconscious preoccupations, that is, what he had been rehearsing throughout his life (Savickas, 2019), in an effort to arrive at the root of his indecision, find an answer to his reason for consulting me and establish connections between his conscious cognitions and subconscious insights.

Below, I list Lionel's answers to selected questions in Part 4 of the CIP (due to space limitations, only a few selected responses are given). Lionel's responses have been edited lightly to preserve their authenticity.

"How can I be of use, help, or value to you? What are you hoping to gain from this session?"

"*I think my interest in taking part is to validate my thoughts in terms of my career path. Get validation that I am heading in the right path in terms of my career.*"

"Validate?"

"*Hmm, whether what I am currently doing and what I am interested in doing in the future. Is there balance, some sort of alignment between what I am doing now* [completing his master's degree in psychology] *and what I will be doing in the future? What other options are there?*"

"What you will be doing in the future?"

"*I am not sure what field or area I want to specialise in or focus on. I considered a community-based, community empowerment project, working with the youth. Those are, however, some of my projects that I want to do in the future. I considered sport development, but I think that one is a much bigger one than me alone. In the future, maybe?*"

"In the future, maybe?"

"*I think, I guess I am a bit uncertain about the future, uncertain of exact time periods. When exactly is the time? I am also not sure in terms of location where I would like work in. Can I realistically go back home and do these projects? This is what seems to be my immediate future unless ...* (SIGHS, SMILES) "*The truth is, I have no clear idea of what I will be doing in the immediate future.*"

i. "What are your
   a. greatest strengths?"
   "*I get along well with people from different backgrounds, I am a keen communicator and listener, I can speak many African languages, I am resilient, humble, serious, disciplined, hard working. I like making witty, cheeky jokes, I am open-minded, and I am curious to learn many things.*"
   b. areas for growth?"
   "*I can read more. I sometimes procrastinate. I am unsure of some things.*"
   (Perceived or felt areas for development that can be converted into realised strengths.)

ii. "What do you value most?"
   "*Taking care of my community, life itself, time, fulfilment, self-actualisation, money.*"

iii. "What do you enjoy doing?"
   "*I enjoy following my favourite sports team, FC Barcelona, its club, and its development structure. Most forms of exercises such as gym, running, and swimming. Helping younger sportspersons. Reading about psychology-related content. Sight-seeing and being in nature. And, of course, travelling!*"

iv. "What did your parents, teachers, or lecturers advise you to study?
   "*Law, because they think it fits my personality. They feel that studying law will help me find a good job, take care of my family, and make good money.*"
   "*Business studies because I have a good sense of business and going into business can be lucrative.*"

v. "Whom did you admire or who were your role models when you were young and why?" (His sense of who he wants to be or become.)
   "*Way, way back. Groups representing same traits: cartoon characters: Goku, Shakes Mokwena, Dexter, Johnny Bravo: funny, laughed readily, strong, leaders to an extent in their own field.*"
   "*Lionel Messi* [Barcelona's captain]. *I watched his debut game by accident on TV one night in Grade 9 and I was blown away by this 17-year old who became an overnight success. I love watching him play. He plays his game in a natural and seemingly effortless manner, yet so unstoppable. He epitomises self-expression and joy. He is described to be the most humble and down-to-earth person. But I distance myself from his personal side, his love story.*"
   "*Sachin Tendulkar* [Indian cricketer]. *At the time I was playing cricket and developing my skills as a cricket player: left-handed (just like me), classy; the way he played the sport; he was short like me.*" (SMILES)

vi. "What is your favourite story-book or movie or book turned into a movie?"

Lionel took quite a while to answer this question. After I gently prompted him, he eventually responded: "*A song of fire and ice. It is actually a series of books that touch on many themes. One of the books revolves around who*

will eventually end up on the iron throne. The main character faced challenges and battles for the throne. There is a lot of comedy in the series, too." (Here, it was not possible to extract key themes or story lines from what he had said.)

vii.   a) "What are your favourite quotations?" (Lionel's advice to himself. His explanations of what these quotations mean to him appear between brackets.)

"*If I get a cow, I am going to milk it.*" ("*This sounds very weird when you hear it. If I get an opportunity, I am going to 'milk' it, that is, make the most of that opportunity.*")

"*Eendag sal die poppe dans*" (Afrikaans) ["*The dolls will dance*"]. ("*The quote comes from South African sports; its history. To me, it says that one day hard work and sacrifice will be rewarded.*") (Here, too, Lionel's explanation differed from the generally understood meaning of the expression, namely that someday there is going to be trouble. This indicates the importance of ensuring that his understanding of matters is correct (recontextualisation).

"*Obomi ngumzamo, Umzamo bubomi*" (Zulu) ["*Life is about trying your best*"]. *This, to me, is very ethical*".

"*Live beautiful.*" ("*Do the beautiful things you so want to do. Approach life in a beautiful way.*")

b) "What is your own motto? How do you want others to quote you in the future?

"*Know thyself.*" ("*It talks to how important it is to know, be, and appreciate oneself. Do what 'is you.' This is the biggest achievement one can attain; a prerequisite to having happy and successful life.*")

viii. "What were the three most hurtful experiences in your youth (experiences that you don't want others to go through)?" (His deep secrets; the pain he suffered passively in early life that he needs to undo actively in the course of time.)

"*I was in boarding school throughout my school years and had to learn to adapt to foreign cultures and circumstances repeatedly. That taught me to become resilient and turn failure into success.*"

"*I never got to spend much time with my parents or was at home as I wanted to.*" (STARES INTO THE DISTANCE) "*I overly identified with sports and neglected my parents; did not show my appreciation, which I regretted.*"

"*My grandpa was shot in front of me while my caretaker and I sat helplessly in his care.*" (There is a substantial correspondence between these responses and the themes uncovered by his three earliest recollections.)

ix. "What is your favourite a) magazine, b) TV programme, c) website, and d) app? Why?"

a. "*Nowadays just academic journals and psychology-related content.*"

b. "*Watching my favourite sports team; FC Barcelona. There's a series that I like, the Vikings: Autobiographical; history of Northmen; how Vikings developed.*" (Here, too, Lionel provided a long-winded and largely incoherent explanation about why he enjoyed the series. Generally speaking, he said that he loved "*the storyline of a farmer who is an adventurer that works his way up to become the king of the medieval Norway.*")

c. "*Don't know. Nothing really.*"

d. "*Maybe (as a utility) WhatsApp. It is a means to communicate. Also, another app that checks the distance that I run.*"

x. "What are your three earliest recollections?" (These stories were interpreted and analysed by us together. They revealed his central career-life themes and his advice to himself about how to deal with his preoccupations. I analysed the three earliest recollections according to the guidelines proposed by Adler (1958), Clark (2002), Hartung (2015), Maree (2013, 2018), Savickas (2019), and Sweeney (1975). I then asked Lionel to add a headline to each of the three stories, and we together modified each heading until Lionel was satisfied that it conveyed the exact meaning of what he was trying to share with me.)

Night Travel Murder Traumatises Vulnerable Boy

a. (SIGHS, THEN LAUGHS) "*At the age of 4, my grandpa, my nurturer, and I were travelling home from his work in the evening.*" (PAUSES, LOOKS STRAIGHT AHEAD AND SIGHS) "*Well, we were basically ambushed. A car drove up from behind, forced us to stop, and parked on my grandfather's side. My nurturer and I were sitting on the other side of the car. A man shot my grandpa several times. So, my nurturer protected me. We escaped unharmed but grandpa passed away that night.*" (TEARS WELL UP IN HIS EYES) (Emotions associated with this recollection: "*Mmm … I am feeling severely traumatised, although consciously I don't want to think how traumatised I was.*" [Dissociation])

Puzzling Cultural Blending Initiates Joyful Celebration

b. "*Mmm … I was about 4 or 5 years old when this incident happened. An uncle of mine got married to a white woman and my family and I attended the wedding. It was a huge thing in our village. The two different cultures getting together and people not understanding what was going on. They had never seen anything like this before. Macaroni and pasta were served as the woman was of Italian descent, and people were puzzled, wondering what kind of worms was served and why.*" (Happiness, having fun; excitement about learning about other cultures.)

Mother's Selflessness Inspires Loving Son

c. "*When I was 3 years old, my mother and I needed to travel to a remote village quite far away to visit an ailing family member. We walked all the way there; a very long distance that took us many hours. I did not want her to do so, but she often picked me up and carried me to protect me. I felt so sorry for her, carrying the heavy load, me and our stuff. I insisted on walking by myself but she refused.*" (Resilience, sympathy, compassion.)

Lionel then insisted that he wanted to "*share another recollection with* [me]*; one that is quite simi-*

lar to the previous story." I, of course, allowed him to do so.

Father's Selflessness Inspires Loving Son

d. "*At the age of 8, my dad and I travelled to my boarding school in his old car. This car overheated, leaving us stranded in the middle of the road. Daddy got out, opened the bonnet, and tried to fix it, but he was unsuccessful. We waited next to the road for the next taxi or hiked, I am not sure. In the next town, daddy put me on a taxi to my boarding school while he searched for people to fix the car.*" (Helplessness; wanting to help but being unable to do so; separation anxiety.)

Lionel's meta-reflections enabled him to establish a connection between his subconscious motivations (things he was not aware of on a conscious level) and his conscious thoughts or cognitions and feelings; a bridge between his past, present, and future. Reflexivity was thus promoted. Among other things, he said that "*completing the intervention was especially interesting on a personal level because of the natural way in which we integrated the generated information and the consistency of the themes that emerged. I was intrigued by how the researcher-counsellor-therapist sat down and jointly with me, the participant, interpreted, analysed and integrated the information without the former sounding like he was advising a real client.*"

The first story reveals Lionel's subconscious anxiety about the daunting challenges associated with travelling back to his roots. Currently, he is considering going back to his roots, but the question that needs to be answered is (in his own words): "*Should I realistically go back home and do practice there? Is that really what I want to and should do now? Is it wise? It is so unsafe there these days … .*" The second story reveals his advice to himself: there is no need to fear the unknown. However, here there is a subtle shift in emphasis: subconsciously, he seems to be assuring himself that there is no need to fear culturally unfamiliar circumstances (symbol of travelling abroad). The third and fourth recollections are reminders from the subconscious that travelling in order to help others and/or access education and training opportunities is feasible provided one is willing to make sacrifices. Together, the three recollections reveal themes of compassion, selflessness, a desire to travel and help others, as well as the will to develop, grow as a human being, cross new boundaries, and be positive.

The first verb Lionel used was "travel." In fact, all the stories relate to a deep-seated desire to travel in an effort to grow, construct himself, help others, and learn more about other cultures. He struggled to make up his mind about what he wanted to do once he had qualified – his subconscious seemed to reassure him that, despite the sacrifices that would have to be made in his life journey, travelling was what he really wanted to do. He was also reassured that it was not important whether he first returned to his roots where he could serve others or went abroad to fulfil his need to meet people from different cultures. These two options were not mutually exclusive either. If he decided to travel abroad first to discover new shores, he would eventually return to his roots a wiser and more experienced person, able to serve his community even better. (However, it would also be all right to return to his roots first, devote time to his community, and gain experience while researching options for working abroad as a counselling psychologist before deciding where to go to.)

At the end of the session, I asked Lionel how he had experienced the intervention.

a. "What did you enjoy?"
"*I have a smile on my face as I think about the experience. I can't exactly describe the emotions that are flashing in my head, but I will never forget what happened. I feel inspired; my spirit has been lifted. Participating in this intervention put me in touch with myself; allowed me to check in with myself with the assistance of the counsellor/researcher. I enjoyed the opportunity and the safe space the counsellor provided that allowed me to open up and really reflect on my answers to the questions.*" (Reflexivity.)

b. "What did you not enjoy?"
"*There was nothing that I did not enjoy. I enjoyed that the interview was about me, asking questions that prompted reflections that revealed the real me.*"

c. "Is there anything else that I need to know about you?"
"*Once more: I always wanted to be free but I could just not get myself so far to act accordingly.*"

d. "What has changed and how do you explain the change(s)?" (The purpose of this question was to establish qualitatively the usefulness of the intervention.)
"*Before taking part, I had sort of an idea, but at the time I wasn't sure if this is really me or maybe some kind of wishful thinking. I was unsure which steps to take, how to structure goals and plans for my future and if my plans were realistic. The intervention confirmed my plans and provided direction: above all, I want to help my people but, above all right now, travel the world. I will strive to find a way to combine the two matters and practically plan my future.*"

We agreed that pursuing his master's degree in counselling psychology was well aligned with his key life themes and consistent with his interests, values, and traits. Secondly, we agreed that he should focus on finding a way to help underserved and disadvantaged populations (young sports people in particular). Because of his desire to travel, he could eventually also investigate the possibility of joining the management component of national sports teams, which would enable him to meet his need to travel, to work with disadvantaged youths, and practise as a psychologist working with a national sports team. I obtained permission to give him the contact details of a young black woman from a neighbouring country (a counselling psychologist, also with a keen interest in sport) who

held such a position – she could provide him with information on the requirements for such a job. After having completed his master's degree, he could consider writing a book on his life story – a book that could inspire people in a similar position similar to his earlier career-life.

Thirdly, we agreed that Lionel should participate in sport and listen to music that uplifted and inspired him.

Next, the two of us co-authored his vision and mission statement (Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2011, 2019). The aim was to impress upon him the importance of fully understanding the meaning and purpose of the intervention and to instil in him a sense of hope in his projected career trajectory.

> "**I want to** *complete my studies in counselling psychology and later specialise in sports psychology and then find opportunities to travel abroad; maybe as the psychologist of a national or provincial sports team. And later return to South Africa so I can serve the needs of my community even better*,
> **so that I can (personal meaning)** *acquire the skills needed to work with other people, especially the poor and the disadvantaged youth; work as a member of a larger team with people, help them to reach their goals and solve their personal problems, actualise their potential* [construct themselves and their careers], *and learn more about themselves and about other people*,
> **and in the process (social meaning)** *travel the world and meet many interesting people from other cultures, touch personal lives and the lives of communities, and enjoy listening to music in new environments that will always remind me of those places.*"
> "*Ultimately, attaining these goals will enable me to thank and honour my beloved parents, who have made so many sacrifices to help me become who I have become and attain what I have attained in life.*"

The intervention thus helped Lionel find answers to his most profound (almost existential) career-life related questions: "Why do I live?," "Why am I here?," "What is the purpose of my being here, of what I am doing, of life itself?" These questions can also be seen as his real reasons for seeking career counselling.

I ended the session by asking Lionel to reflect carefully on the intervention and to stay in touch with me for as long as he felt the need to do so.

Discussion
The goal of this study was to establish the influence of career construction counselling (based on co-constructive conversations) on the career-choice indecision of a master's degree student in psychology. The following specific research questions guided the research.
a. How did the participant experience the career construction counselling?
b. What was the influence of the intervention on the participant's career indecision?
c. What changes did the intervention foster?

d. What factors prompted these changes?

These four questions are considered in succession and the findings related to the literature on the influence of career construction intervention on people's ability to manage changing occupational contexts.

The qualitative outcomes are discussed first.

How did the Participant Experience the Career Construction Counselling?
Lionel declared that he had found the experience "*literally life changing.*" He appreciated the fact that he was afforded the opportunity to narrate key aspects of his autobiography and that his deepest thoughts and ideals were validated (authorised) (Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2015a, 2015b, 2019). He believed that his reflections enhanced his self-insight and uncovered ways in which he could make personal meaning in his future career. He could now come to terms with his indecision and move forward resolutely: "*The most challenging part was when we read the sentences out loud. I felt a lot of feelings moments before reading mine aloud but afterwards I felt liberated and good about myself. Talking to myself about myself is not something I have had an opportunity to do a lot lately, so it was a challenging but pleasant activity.*"

What was the Influence of the Intervention on the Participant's Career Indecision?
Lionel initially stated that he needed validation of being on the right path regarding his career. He needed confirmation of the alignment between his master's degree studies in counselling psychology and what he wanted to do in the future. He was unsure whether he should venture into the field of community-based empowerment work (with youth sports teams). He wanted to travel and work with youth sports teams abroad but was hesitant and perhaps even afraid to do so. After the intervention, he declared that participating in the intervention had shown him that previously – when deciding on his future career and employment – he had tended to look for work just as a means of making money and putting food on table (a metaphor for safety). However, he now realised that just making money should not be the basis of career decision making ("*participating gave me so much more than career counselling only*"). He also learned that much more was involved in career decision making than career-related interests only, and that his personal story was not something separate but was actually an integral part of his career story. What he was requesting therefore was guidance concerning a current career-life project (Cochran, 1992; Maree & Di Fabio, 2018; Savickas, 2019). In operational terms, he needed counselling on how to construct a life project comprising a) a key life theme involving his need to travel, see the world, and help his

disadvantaged fellow countrymen and country-women; b) a concomitant life task involving reigniting his career decision and making meaning of his studies, especially as his busy schedule meant that he could no longer participate in sport as he would have liked; and c) doing what he could to enjoy life again by, for instance, participating in sport more often, setting and achieving academic goals, socialising with friends, and clarifying his career-life identity (Cochran, 1992; Savickas, 2019).

What Changes did the Intervention Bring About?

In Lionel's words: "*The career construction intervention felt like a divine intervention from God, my ancestors, and other supernatural forces that had all combined to give me this critical knowledge about myself.*" Even though he still needed to do a thorough job analysis to fine-tune aspects of his decision, he displayed signs of improved career decision-making readiness (adaptive readiness) and of actually adapting to ever-changing circumstances in his career-life by being willing to actively explore career possibilities (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This finding on his progress is consistent with the findings of Maree (2018) and Wehrle, Kira and Klehe (2019) on the power of career construction counselling to effect change in the lives of young people.

What Factors Prompted These Changes?

Lionel said that he felt that the "*genuine, unconditional, positive regard*" demonstrated during the intervention, coupled with the **subconscious** advice obtained from "*feeling and thinking about some earlier painful experiences and other childhood memories,*" had helped him understand why he had previously been unable to connect and identify with the idea of travelling – an activity that appealed to him and would enable him to construct his career and himself adequately, experience purpose in his career-life, and make social contributions.

The Influence of Career Construction Counselling (based on Co-Constructive Conversations) on the Career Choice Indecision of a Master's Degree Student in Psychology

In summary, Lionel was assisted to reflect critically on key aspects of his career-life story by considering and reconsidering past memories, encounters, and thoughts. This helped him connect his past and his present with his career future (Savickas, 2016). Recounting his career-life story, coupled with his reflections and meta-reflections, shed light on how he made meaning of his career-life and how this enhanced his career decision making (Hartung & Vess, 2016; Savickas, 2019; Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck & Van Vianen, 2009). It also revealed his sense of meaning and hope and how he endeavoured to design a purposeful life that would enable him to make meaningful social contributions. Lionel's responses and reflections clarified his interests, attributes, and motivations in relation to some of his idiosyncratic and general life tasks and key career-life themes and jointly comprise a life project (Cochran, 1992; Savickas, 2019). In mapping the outline of his career-life story, we identified the difference between his conscious view of a possible future career-life trajectory and his **subconsciously regulated perspective** on that trajectory. Together, we co-constructed his possible career-life trajectory by eliciting inner advice from himself with regard to why he had sought career counselling.

Lionel's experiences demonstrated how a person's **conscious knowledge** could be connected with his **subconscious advice** through career construction counselling to resolve career choice indecision. This finding is consistent with that of Peng and Chen (2014) on the power of career construction counselling to help people struggling with career indecision (re)discover a sense of purpose in their career-lives. It also confirms Clark's (2002) view that a closely intertwined sequence of early experiences elicited indirectly (by eliciting early memories) and semi-directly (by eliciting hurtful experiences) can shape how people respond to occurrences that continue to influence their actions subconsciously. The specific culture content of this case study confirms McAdams' (2013) assertion that a person's culture accounts for "the basic forms, metaphors, motifs, and plots out of which narrative identity is made" (p. 287). The findings demonstrate also how Lionel, as an emerging adult (Arnett, 2000) and as an autobiographical author (McAdams, 2013), "work[ed] to formulate a meaningful narrative for life, integrating the reconstructed episodic past and the imagined episodic future in such a way as to explain, for the self and for others, why the actor does what it does, why the agent wants what it wants, and who the self was, is, and will be as a developing person in time" (p. 273).

As indicated by several authors (e.g. Maree, 2019; Reid, 2018), certain concerns and reservations remain about the CCI's potential to elicit sufficient information for the purposes of conducting career counselling in contexts that differ from the original context in and for which the CCI was initially developed. In the present research, the third and fourth questions (What are your favourite magazines, etc.?; What is your favourite book?) failed to elicit particularly useful responses. In line with Savickas' (2011) view that the CCI can be used with or without other assessment instruments, certain questions from the CIP were used in addition to the CCI questions to promote the elicitation of thick data, crystallisation, and the general trustworthiness of the research (*A Guide to Reflective Career Counselling*, 2012; Savickas, 2011).

The present research also supports McAdams and Olson's (2010) view that "[t]o construct a narrative identity, the person must envision his or her entire life – the past reconstructed and the future imagined – as a story that portrays a meaningful sequence of life events to explain how the person has developed into who he or she is now and may develop into who he or she may be in the future" (p. 528). The intervention promoted reflexivity in that Lionel was assisted to consider and reconsider past memories, encounters, and thoughts and to connect the past and the present with his career future (Savickas, 2016).

Limitations

The cultural differences between Lionel and me may have caused some misunderstanding between us. Certain cultural nuances may have gone unnoticed during the intervention. In addition, my deep interest in the plight of the disadvantaged, rural people may have resulted in my being somewhat less objective than I could have been. Thirdly, the duration of the research together with the need for extensive training in the mode of intervention described here may deter others from conducting this kind of research (Essays, UK, 2018). The fact that I fulfilled the dual roles of counsellor and researcher may have influenced the outcomes of the research (Hay-Smith et al., 2016) although I did all I could to prevent such a possibility by planning the research methodology (including the assessment and intervention) carefully up front and then implementing and monitoring it closely.

Below, some of the limitations listed above are transformed into recommendations.

Recommendations

The research reported on here should be replicated in different contexts with different participants. A need exists for career counselling researchers and practitioners to exercise due caution when applying the narrative approach in contexts different from those in which the approach was initially developed and implemented. In other words, the contextualising, decontextualising, co-contextualising, and recontextualising of such interventions is key to ensuring the success of the kind of research reported on here. A few questions in addition to the five questions in the CCI could be added to promote triangulation, crystallisation, and trustworthiness (Savickas, 2011). Different intervention techniques and strategies should be used to assess its usefulness and effectiveness. In addition, career counselling practitioners who choose to implement this kind of intervention require adequate training under supervision before implementing the intervention themselves (especially in impoverished rural contexts). In addition, longitudinal studies (including regular follow-up with participants) are essential. Likewise, the integrative use of quantitative assessment and narrative intervention in different contexts should be considered to enhance the validity and reliability of this kind of intervention style.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to establish the influence of career construction counselling (based on co-constructive conversations) on the career choice indecision of a master's degree student in psychology. To this end, how the participant experienced the career construction counselling and, especially, the influence of the intervention on his career indecision, were investigated. Moreover, the changes brought about in the participant as well as the factors that prompted these changes were examined. The findings demonstrate the value of this kind of intervention in enabling the participant to reflect critically on key facets of his career-life story. Doing so revealed the difference between his conscious view of a possible future career-life trajectory and his subconsciously regulated perspective on that trajectory.

This case study confirmed the effectiveness of the career construction counselling style (using the CCI in conjunction with the CIP) in eliciting and integrating various career-life stories of a master's degree student struggling with career indecision. The approach reported on here holds much promise as a way of helping people struggling with career indecision to revisit their stifled dreams and plans, meet their decision-making challenges, and enable them to move forward with renewed vigour, motivation, and hope in the workplace (Savickas, 2019). The intervention promoted connecting the participant's conscious knowledge with his subconscious advice to enable him to resolve his career choice indecision. However, success depended on uncovering and examining the roots of the participant's career indecision.

Major work-defining technological advances (brought about by the fourth industrial revolution (Work 4.0)) are rapidly changing the world of work. Rapid transformation in the world of work is leaving many workers feeling alienated and deprived of their sense of safety and security in erstwhile safe and secure work environments. To help them regain their lost sense of safety and security, it is important to think innovatively about work-related challenges. For this reason, it seems important to (a) examine people's conscious knowledge about themselves and the world of work, (b) uncover their subconscious insights and, (c) subsequently, connecting their conscious knowledge about themselves with their subconscious insights to (d) enhance their self-advising. Based on the findings reported on in this article, such a strategy may rekindle their sense of self-efficacy and of being in control of fluid work contexts. This should re-vitalise their conviction that they are capable of constant re- and upskilling

themselves and promoting their chances to access and retain sustainable decent work.

Notes
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