

# **The Genuine Scientist-Practitioner in Vocational Psychology: An Autoethnography**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the notion of the scientist-practitioner in vocational psychology. It is suggested that despite the visage of science and technology, the actual practice of vocational psychology and career counselling is a very personal endeavour. The paper uses autoethnography to elucidate the construction of the career assessment and counselling procedure My Career Chapter. It is argued that the genuine creator of the procedure was not the chimerical scientist-practitioner; rather it was a sensitive rural, working-class boy who had transcended strictures of economic class and culture. His transformation inherently effected his doing the science and practice of vocational psychology. The paper suggests that the lamented divide between theory and practice in vocational psychology may be reduced through autoethnographic inquiry, which proffers a personal bridge between the two without diminishing commitment to orthodox forms of psychological science.

**KEYWORDS:** autoethnography, scientist-practitioner, career development, career counselling, social-class, My Career Chapter

## The Genuine Scientist-Practitioner in Vocational Psychology: An Autoethnography

### 1. Introduction

The *scientist-practitioner* model is predominant in contemporary psychology practice and training (Belar & Perry, 1992; O'Gorman, 2001); take as evidence, for example, the Special Issue of *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* (2006). The model resounds in vocational psychology with career development practitioners being referred to as “applied behavioural scientists” (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, p. 49). Thus endowed, career development practitioners have been reified as eclectic purveyors of scientifically proven, evidence-based techniques. It is doubtless that vocational psychology proffers a vast array of technical products available for career assessment and counselling (e.g., Kapes & Whitfield, 2002). New career assessment procedures are presented in the psychological science literature as if they were constructed upon the basis of purely rational, technical, and objective means; moreover, as if thoroughly disconnected from the human beings that brought them into production. Whilst this reporting convention projects an apposite visage of scientific method and technology, it does little to assist the curious theorist and practitioner who may be interested in knowing the specific local conditions that influenced the construction of a quantitative psychometric or qualitative career assessment procedure.

This study questions the *scientist-practitioner* discourse and culture through exemplification of the personal and subjective processes of doing the scientific practice of vocational psychology, specifically through a case study of the development of a career assessment and counselling procedure—My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography (McIlveen, 2006).

#### 1.1 My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography

My Career Chapter is a qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure. Its development was not an entirely sequential, logical, and rational process from beginning to end. That type of formal intellectual and technical processing—the ostensible work of the prototypical *scientist-practitioner*—featured in the latter stages of development in which the procedure was refined according to theoretical tenets and extant assessment processes that were based upon similar theory. Much of the process was a creative endeavour that was influenced by a range of professional and personal factors including work, music, literature, conversations, and actual counselling experiences. It was very much a “homemade assessment method” (Goldman, 1992, p. 618) engaging the personal creativity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) of me the *scientist-practitioner*. There were, nevertheless, key scientific works that stimulated surges of creative thinking and these are outlined briefly in the next section.

##### 1.1.1 Underpinning theories

In developing My Career Chapter, I drew upon the respective theoretical literatures pertaining to Systems Theory Framework (STF, Patton & McMahon, 2006), the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005), the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), and also to the applied literature of constructivist, narrative career counselling (Cochran, 1997).

The STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006) comprehensively abducts career from the orthodox, modernist conceptions of vocational psychology. The STF posits career as a multifarious psychosocial process entailing the dynamic interaction of proximal personal conditions (e.g., gender, values, health, sexual orientation, disability, ability, interests, moral beliefs, skills, personality, world-of-work knowledge, age, self-concept, physical attributes,

ethnicity, and aptitudes), but includes distal social influences upon career (e.g., family, peers, community groups, education institutions, media, and workplace), and broader environmental-societal influences (e.g., historical trends, employment market, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and globalization) within its frame of reference. Above all, the STF contextualises the individual and posits *story* as a key psychosocial process through which individuals make meaning of the influences of career and life.

As with the STF and its theoretical element of career-related *story*, the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005) notably addresses the subjectivity of career. Whilst the Theory of Career Construction subsumes the usual features of career objectified (e.g., traits, abilities), it describes career as an intrinsically personal project made meaningful through *life themes* that are authored, or constructed, by the individual. Hence,

...career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations that explain vocational developmental tasks and occupational transitions, exercises that strengthen adaptive fitness, and activities that clarify and validate vocational self-concepts (Savickas, 2005, p. 46).

It is because of Savickas' conceptualization that career is generated through conversations, and made meaningful through *life themes*, that it becomes necessary to refer to a psychological theory of self in which dialogue is paramount to self-construction and meaning-making.

The Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) defines the *self* with respect to the "I" being able to shift perspective as:

...a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous "I" positions in an imaginal landscape. As in a landscape, the "I" has the possibility to move from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The "I" is able to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The different voices relate to one another as interacting characters in a story, who from their respective "I" positions exchange information about their respective "me(s)" and their worlds, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self (Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993, pp. 215-216).

In this way, a person engages in reflexive dialogue with himself or herself, and with others—real or imagined—and, by doing so, authors and acts a life.

The Theory of Dialogical Self has been used to conceptually advance the Theory of Career Construction and its theoretical construct of career-defining *life themes* because *dialogical self* presents a socially mediated, psychological mechanism by which the construction of *life themes* may be understood (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). There are equivalent implications for the construct of *story* used in the STF. Together, integrated, the three theories hold out a postmodern view of career through which the individual progressively recreates himself or herself through dialogical relations, whilst moving across the multiple influences identified in the STF of career, all the while progressively storying his or her *life themes*.

Upon conception of the core ideas of My Career Chapter, its subsequent technical construction was informed in a rational and ordered manner by recommendations on how to create a qualitative career assessment process (e.g., McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). These recommendations provided the technical guidance on how to lay out the content and structure of the procedure. Its refinement was also guided by a desire to not replicate extant methods of constructivist career assessment, such as My System of Career Influence (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), which is derived from the STF, and composing a Life History (Cochran, 1997). Whilst acknowledging the relevance of other constructivist theories for career, such as the Contextualist-Action Theory (Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002), a

concerted attempt was made to embed My Career Chapter within the three primary theories so as to advance their formulation and applications within my own practice and the field.

### 1.1.2 Application in counselling

Procedurally, My Career Chapter requires the client to complete an autobiography using structured guidelines for the writing and reflection process. It is presented to clients as a career counselling homework exercise, in the form of a printed workbook complete with instructions. In the main body of the booklet, the client writes about his or her career by completing part-sentences associated with each of the myriad influences identified in the STF (i.e., personal, social, societal-environmental influences), using a process akin to the sentence-completion procedure established by Loevinger (1985). Take, for example, the career influence of *moral beliefs*. A client would complete the following sentence stems, and in the last two stems would provide an indication of his or her emotional state in relation to the influence and its perceived degree of impact:

- I have always believed strongly that .....
- I believe that career .....
- What I believe in the future .....
- I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my morals because .....
- My morals have a very positive / positive / indifferent / neutral / very negative impact upon my careerlife because .....

Having completed the booklet in which influences of the STF have been written about, which usually takes approximately two hours in one sitting, the client returns to the next scheduled counselling session at which the chapter of his or career is read aloud by the counsellor, discussed, and co-constructively interpreted. Particular attention is paid to influences with significant emotional valence and impact, and to the recurrence of themes in the text—as if listening to a storyteller (cf. McMahon, 2006). Having completed the first reading and interpretation of the booklet, career counselling continues, using the written text as grist for further discussion.

Essentially, My Career Chapter provides a semi-structured process that facilitates clients writing a brief autobiographical story in which career is the core issue. It may be situated within the usual flow of career counselling, perhaps following initial interviews, and being used in combination with other career assessment procedures, either qualitative methods or psychometrics. The key to its application is to allow the client to experience another means of exploration and expression in counselling.

### 1.2 Study aims

The current study brings together theory, practice, and, moreover, the practitioner, all cohered into a narrative account of the lived experience of a critical-scientist and critical-practitioner. The study aims to demonstrate that although a *scientist-practitioner* conceived the procedure, it aims to demonstrate that the doing of scientific practice in vocational psychology is a profoundly personal process. In doing so, this reflexive study also aims to satisfy the recommendation by McMahon and Patton (2006) that career counsellors connect with their own career stories in order to coalesce theory and practice.

## 2. Method

The paradigm through which this study is reported is constructivist-interpretivist in ontology and epistemology, and tends toward a critical stance in its axiology, rhetorical structure, and method (Ponterotto, 2005). As a reflexive and critical study, it explicates the

specific local conditions surrounding the development of My Career Chapter, and concomitantly brings the notion of *scientist-practitioner* into consideration.

## 2.1 Research design

This study entailed an iterative, cyclical process of creation and critical reflection. It recounts a process, it is historical, constructed through retrospection, introspection and interpretation, and it is, moreover, a personal record. This study was prepared using the qualitative method of autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Roth, 2005). Autoethnography can be conceptualised as:

...research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Autoethnographies may combine fiction with nonfiction (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 189-190).

Autoethnography relates readily to interpretive biography (Denzin, 1989) and falls within the ambit of ethnography (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). Ethnography takes interest in what people do and know, how they describe their worlds, and the things that they make and use (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005). As a self-ethnographic project, this study describes an investigation into one member of an ethnographic group and what that group makes and does. In this vein, I am to be seen as member of the group “scientist-practitioner psychologist” and a member of subset groupings “vocational psychologist” and “career counsellor”. I have used autoethnography as the method for this study to reflexively and critically investigate and reveal my own conditions as a researcher and practitioner in order to inspect the notion of *scientist-practitioner* in vocational psychology. In reporting the study, I have presented a narrative of the construction of My Career Chapter as an autoethnographic example of what members of a particular grouping make and do in their usual practices (i.e., scientific practice).

## 2.2 Participants

Apropos of the autoethnographic criterion of *complete member researcher* (Anderson, 2006), I declare that I have been a State Registered psychologist since 1993, have completed undergraduate studies in psychology, through science, and later completed graduate studies in psychology, education, and career development, and have held memberships of appropriate professional associations. My practice as a clinician commenced in the mental health industry, working in a psychiatric hospital and a community mental health service for regional and rural areas. My formative experiences as a clinician involved psychological assessment, diagnostic formulation, and the provision of psychological treatment within the professional context of a multi-disciplinary psychiatric team and an ethos of *evidence-based practice*. My work in the higher education sector and the practice of vocational psychology has a similar professional flavour. In all, it is not an unusual professional history for an Australian *scientist-practitioner* psychologist.

Autoethnographic research involves crossing boundaries of identity by the researcher, who is necessarily the research subject (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Thus the primary participant was myself multiply-positioned as the authors of various “professional” Me states representative of the ethnographic grouping (i.e., *scientist-practitioner*, vocational psychologist) crossed over various “personal” Me states (e.g., rural kid from a low socio-economic class).

Other participants were included to ask both supportive and penetrating questions, and to corroborate or correct my recollections, assertions and conclusions (Tenni, Smyth, &

Boucher, 2003). They included my doctoral supervisor, colleagues, and friends who would critically listen to my recollections and ideas, and read through this manuscript.

### 2.3 Sources of data

An autoethnography can be based upon various forms of data, both current and historical (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A foundational source of data was the process of writing an autobiographical account which entailed reflection, writing, and re-writing in a cyclical process. In addition, there were several streams of information used in this reflexive study that were pertinent to the construction of My Career Chapter. These other sources included (a) scientific literature; (b) English literature, philosophy and music; (c) conversations and emails; (d) phenomenological experiences; and (e) artifacts from my past, including documents from my graduate training programme for career development.

### 2.4 Data analysis

The data analysis process involved retrospection, introspection and reflective interpretation and was considered in view of the criteria for good qualitative research in counselling psychology (Morrow, 2005) and critical, reflexive career development practice (Watson, 2006). With respect to the operational method of analysis, I used emotionally-laden recollections which were stimulated by conversations, reading, listening to music, and inspection of actual print copies of documents that accrued over the years of the project's duration. Important "discoveries" and recollections that were typed into the manuscript itself, were used as notes for later analysis, and were reviewed as part of this reflective process. The streams of information were made meaningful through the processes of my own critical self-awareness, which underpins my professional practices and perspectives (McIlveen, 2007; McIlveen & Patton, 2006) and my phenomenological experiencing of the actual construction process.

The emotive recollections and record (viz., the manuscript) were presented to, and corroborated through, conversations with friends and colleagues who were aware of my history and comprised my community-of-practice. Tillmann-Healy (2003) argued that friendship offers a useful source of data and method for qualitative research. In this vein, the cumulative manuscript of the study was given to those same individuals for their reading and for their cross-checking to ensure that their view of (a possible) me was consistent with the conversations we had experienced and their historical understanding of my life and the process of constructing My Career Chapter. This methodological process was akin to Anderson's (2006) *analytic autoethnography* in which dialogue with other informants has been used to secure generalisation. Whilst not necessary as a means of securing authenticity for an *evocative autoethnography*, I engaged in this process of checking in order to confirm my own confidence in my recollections, record, and text as representation and to engage the human field of my own social construction.

To pursue that agenda of honest reflection, Morrow (2005) presented a range of issues that the researcher should reveal in order to explicate his or her position as researcher. Likewise, within the context of career counselling research, Watson (2006, p. 54) posed a set of questions for career counsellors to facilitate their self-reflection and understanding of their positioning with respect to culture. These questions included, for example:

Where do your values and beliefs come from? How are these values and beliefs influenced by your life-span developmental process? How do your family, your gender and your multicultural background affect your values? (p. 54).

Watson's questions were appropriate for this autoethnographic study and were incorporated in combination with Morrow's (2005) suggestions for the purpose of extending the

formulating of myself as described in the subsection *Autobiographical Critical Self-Awareness*.

### 3. Results

The results are organised and presented narratively across significant themes that dynamically relate to the conditions that contributed to the conception of My Career Chapter. The results culminate in a summary of the cycling between theory, self and practice and reflect a profoundly personal history of transit between two socio-economic worlds.

#### 3.1 Autobiographical Critical Self-Awareness

##### 3.1.1 Working-class boy made good

I was raised the son of an iconic Australian sheep shearer, in a working class family, and one without much money. Whilst shearers enjoy elevated status within the lore of the Australian working class as the quintessential “hard-worker”, they have also been the target of negative stereotypes promulgated throughout a century of industrial struggle. I lived on outback, isolated rural sheep and cattle stations for some years and boarded with host families in small towns during my high school years. My first paid employment was as a roustabout working in sheep shearing sheds. This semi-skilled occupation is very much the lowest of the pecking order of the Australian wool industry.

As an adolescent my financial status was exemplified by having to dress in affordable (or cheaper) clothes which were articles of derision in my conservative schools. I always experienced being an outsider in a particular school community; not simply because I was not born in the township, but because I was of lower class in the eyes of the more powerful and well resourced students. My “outsiderness” was enhanced because of my precocious interest in left-wing politics; which frequently produced castigation from various quarters. To me it felt that the school was divided by class differences and imbued with the distinctions of religious denominations. Of course it did not help that I had publicly abandoned my Christian faith—much to the apparent chagrin of a school master. To cope with its conservative strictures, I personally drove myself to learn how to overcome the personalised class difference which I felt painfully, yet quietly.

The most powerful strategy I consciously implemented was to learn how to be like “them”—a wolf in sheep’s clothing. This queer sort of Fabianism continued into my early adulthood and is now manifest in my membership of a political party which I once so outwardly derided. In an historical sense, the most gratifying achievement of the strategy, and in overcoming the characteristics of the school community, was being elected to the student council. It seemed to work as an effective way of negotiating the obstacles of being.

A refinement of my strategies to overcome the inherent disadvantages of my socio-economic class was to deliberately learn how to speak a different dialect, by changing from the enunciation of the rural lower class to that of educated metropolitan class. I became a pretender in many ways. As a young adult I spent considerable energy in reading and practising the dictates of etiquette guides and keenly observing the subtle differences of discourse. Though I had deeply appreciated classical music from an early age, despite being raised on a diet of country and western, the unfamiliarity I felt in immersing myself into the discourse of the middle-class was typified by my decision to attend concerts and opera, rather than simply listen to recordings. With no mentor to guide me on the crucial subtleties (e.g., the most appropriate moments to clap), these experiences were horrific.

I can now speak dialects of the Australian rural working class and the metropolitan middle-class with utter confidence; my social self changes according to context and I mostly feel emotionally secure and comfortable with both. This class-jumping is all much to the



paradoxical horror of my father, who, on the one hand is deeply proud of my achievements within the middle-class, but in the spirit of working class egalitarianism so stereotypically Australian, is equally dismissive of my social status and likes to bring me “down a peg or two” in a playful laconic fashion, not hurtfully, but to ensure that his egalitarian values instilled within me are not lost or diminished.

Approximately five years before I commenced the development of My Career Chapter, I completed a formal graduate degree programme in adult career development with an Australian university. Although I had been a State registered psychologist for almost seven years prior to commencing the training, my area of work was clinical psychology and I only had a basic grasp of vocational psychology. Inspection of assessment papers from those early years of engagement in the professional sub-discipline revealed emerging themes that would later coalesce as constructivist practices. This evolution was a crucial pre-condition for my later entry into narrative practices. Sentences from an assessment paper gave indications of the beginning of understanding the role of discourse in the development of career identity:

Although I no longer feel rural and identify less with rural lifestyle, I certainly understand the culture in which I was raised and can relate to it with ease. As much as I can chat over a café latte oblivious to the traffic roaring by, I can still talk “sheep [manure]” (McIlveen, 2000, p. 5).

Here I was describing my ability to relate to two cultures using two discrete examples of the discourse of both: drinking coffee within the context of metropolitan of “yuppy-speak”, yet talking “sheep [manure]”—meaning the casual banter that occurs at the end of the shearing day and over a few “coldies” (i.e., very cold beers). This (and other) assignment papers were replete with my coming to understand the evolution of my own career, but moreover through the lens of the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and broader cultural and economic influences.

There remains, nevertheless, a caveat to all of this class-jumping through discursive hoops. On rare occasions I feel like a fraud; that I somehow do not belong. This pain is felt and it speaks to the naturalised oppression of those who cannot gain access to the resources of society because of their limiting discursive cultures and reverberates the arguments of Foucault (1994) that discourse fixes identity. This is an instructive guide for me in my work with clients and our attempts to build a career story together, toward their emancipation and individualised manifestation.

### 3.1.2 Liberal democrat

Having worked as a roustabout in shearing sheds as a young man, I later moved on to a university education and took to the profession of psychologist. At the time of writing this study I was almost 37 years of age. I am a middle-class, male Australian, of Anglo-Saxon heritage, and morally imbued with a deep sense of Protestant work ethic and concomitant individualism. My socio-economic class position and moral assumptions have had an ineluctable influence upon my counselling through my belief that the individual can, and morally should—notwithstanding insurmountable environmental conditions—take responsibility for his or her self-construction within his or her unique context.

This position, with respect to counselling, was coalesced by my reading of *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl (1959/1984), who argued that even in the most abhorrent circumstances a person can make a meaningful existence of his or her life. My career counselling practice is thus limited by that dimension of morality and individualism. Clients who cannot, or will not, take personal responsibility may not benefit from my career counselling practices. As a product of my own history and being, My Career Chapter is therefore limited—at least it is in my hands.

To me, career counselling is a process of facilitating an individual's construction within their context of influences. In addition, it is a value-laden endeavour in the sense that I aim to assist an individual to understand his or her discursive existence and concomitant discursive limitations. This aim speaks to a value of liberation within context. I want my clients to build their own worlds and to be able to selectively choose how they construct and re-construct their history, present and future. Viewed critically, this value presents a theme of neo-liberalism and individualism; which is nevertheless contextualised within a theme of social justice, exemplified by some of my work toward enabling non-traditional students' access into higher education (McIlveen, Everton, & Clarke, 2005; McIlveen, Ford, & Everton, 2005), and through higher education (McIlveen, Cameron, McLachlan, & Gunn, 2005), and concern that the individual will not be forgotten in the broader industry of career development (McIlveen, 2007; McIlveen & Patton, 2006). This theme is manifest in my own personal struggles with class and identity discursively formulated in life and in career counselling.

Take, for example, the word “just”, which makes a regular appearance in career counselling with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, typically in the form of self-limiting statements. One which rings loudly in my ears and reminds of my commitment to social justice and the power of dialogue is the statement by an Indigenous woman who said, in response to my encouragement to study at university, “but I’m just an Aboriginal from [isolated rural Aboriginal mission town]”. That session entailed a long discussion of her story and her language, including deconstruction of the word “just” because of its association with being stuck within a class and a limited identity of “justness”. This issue of course plays upon my own personal experience of class and my desires to break free by speaking myself into another being.

### 3.1.3 Music and literature

For most of my life I have been affected by music and, more recently, English literature—its recency being due to my transcendence of my training and self-characterisation as a scientist to the exclusion of all else. Several pieces of music, so familiar to me, have influenced my thinking apropos of this research project.

The story and play *Pygmalion* (Shaw, 2003) and its later musical adaptation *My Fair Lady* (Cukor, 1964) profoundly influenced my thinking. The subtleties of language and conversation transformed Eliza Doolittle from white trash to apparent nobility. What had changed for poor Eliza? Some soap and finery made the finishing touches, but physically she was the same. It was her new voice replete with received English that created a new identity. Eliza heard herself speak anew and she became what she heard. This musical, and its subtle meanings, echo my own personal experiences of late adolescence. I hear Eliza in the voice of my clients who hail from disadvantaged backgrounds and she metaphorically sings for me too.

A single line from the classic song *Do Re Mi*—“Me, a name, I call myself”—from the *Sound of Music* (Wise, 1965) captures the essence of the problematic of a narrative approach to personal identity. In this song and through these words, a person names herself and juxtaposes the James' (1890/1952) conception of *me* and the *I*. This quirky coincidence further emboldened my commitment to the Theory of Dialogical Self as a theoretical vehicle which highlights the spoken construction of self, of *I* talking *Me* into being, or in this case, singing *Me* into being.

Another piece of music which likewise affirmed my grasp of the Theory of Dialogical Self was Neil Diamond's (1971) angst-ridden song, *I Am I Said*, which captured not only his loneliness, but the power of an individual's echo as it rings in his or her ears against the confines of an unresponsive void:

“I am,” I said  
 To no one there  
 And no one heard at all  
 Not even the chair.

In this moment of existential grief, his identity is influenced not so much by others per se, but by their absence and his struggle to find an identity without them (or at least, their speaking to him in familiarity) as he moves through life. He was a fish out of water; a man removed from the discourse that afforded him identity and therefore existence. This reverberates Buber’s (1958/1923) *I and Thou*; that existence is made in the genuine connections between individuals—through dialogical transactions.

An example of the constructive process associated with the emails to my supervisor was my writing on the matter of associating the multidimensional characters in Charles Dickens’ (1843) *A Christmas Carol* (i.e., ghost of Christmas past, present and future) with the theoretical notion of a *chronotope* and the *dialogical self*. An excerpt of the email is provided here:

After testing the new version of My Career Chapter (MCC), I would like to consider a study in which an individual writes MCC from two I-positions, which are positioned in two time zones. I would like to think that this could be done by using a method based upon Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” (bear with me, this is going somewhere). Hermans and mates argue that I-positions are spatially and temporally adhered and borrow the term ‘chronotope’, from Bahktin, which indicates a literary character in a time-and-space. So a person at time A (say now) could talk with an imaginal same person at time B (say 10 years hence). . . . . Anyway, Scrooge gets a visit from a ghost who shows him his past, present and future self. Behold, old Scrooge gets some insight into being a miserable old bastard and suddenly becomes nice (McIlveen, personal communication, January 13, 2006).

This example indicates how my thinking and theorising around dialogical self was clarified, and, to a certain extent, reified through the emailing process which itself generates real and imagined dialogical transactions. Notwithstanding my cogitations on theory, the very act of writing them and speaking them was influential in their coalescence.

Music and literature did not stimulate the technical construction of My Career Chapter. To me, they confirmed that I was on track to creating a process that somehow related to the existence of people and their construction of self. If, “out there” in music and literature, the idea that dialogue was part of the construction of self, then this could only lend support to my thinking, and moreover, my emotional satisfaction that the revision was appropriate. In addition, I wanted for clients to achieve similar social empowerment through their dialogical understanding and development to transit discourses for their own career success. A method to assist them to speak their voices was thus a goal of my professional work and now my research endeavour.

### **3.1.4 Phenomenological experiencing**

Experiences of epiphany (Denzin, 1989) and emotional experiences are important markers in ethnographic research and need to be included in the analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Denzin (1989) described four types of epiphany: major; cumulative; illuminative/minor; and relived/retrospectively meaningful. So too the experience of the researcher’s body should be included in the research analysis (Finlay, 2006). The construction of My Career Chapter was associated with intense emotional, behavioural and physical experiences. Two examples are briefly recounted here as they provide an additional dimension to the process of creating My Career Chapter.

The theoretical works which had an intense place in my thinking (viz, Hermans & Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1993) were read within a fortnight of one another. The reading of these works was associated with considerable emotional excitement, as if I had fallen upon something fabulous—a major epiphany! I at once believed that the construction of self through dialogue and immersion within multifarious discourses, was a crucial feature that was absent within the STF. The following excerpt from an email to my supervisor highlights the emotive tension and the breathlessness which I physically felt in attempting to bring the theories together:

[I have to] create a synthesis of the three theoretical approaches (ie, STF, Savickas' Level III Life Themes, and Narrative/Dialogical). I have an inchoate synthesis in my head already and I can almost theoretically pull all three areas together. Got to tell you, I am sort of speechless with the anxiety of trying to hold them together - so god-damned abstract - but I know I can do it (McIlveen, personal communication, November 22, 2005).

These emotional runs were associated with a flurry of activity, racing thoughts and then calmness as an idea on how to form the version coalesced in my mind. The moment felt as if I had moved into a new psychological world as a result of understanding this theory and its implications. This would then precipitate a careful and rational search and review of extant scientific literature.

The reading was also associated with a behaviour that was completely unfamiliar to me. Prior to my reading of the work by McAdams (1993) I had never in my life knowingly and deliberately written comments on, or underlined text, or in any meaningful way marked a library book. The reading was associated with such an emotional surge; it was as if the urgency of the situation required me to immediately write down notes for fear of losing the ideas. I still feel a sense of embarrassment and guilt for defacing the book.

Upon completion of the final draft of the manuscript of My Career Chapter I felt a peculiar nausea tinged with anxiety, joy and sadness. To me this emotive physical experience felt as if I had finished the work and that only editorial tidying up remained to be done. This represented a minor epiphany (Denzin, 1989).

### **3.1.5 Narrative formulation**

Having presented those selected elements of my “personal self” as data, this part of the Results presents an analysis of the recursive cycle of practice, self, and theory, by drawing upon myself as practitioner and the technical literature which underpinned the final formation of My Career Chapter.

I, dialogically positioned (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) as critical-scientist and critical practitioner, set out to create a career counselling process that was inherently consistent with my practices, the environment in which I practised, and my professional aspirations to establish career counselling within that environment. As a practitioner, and like all others, I bring theories and methods to life, either unwittingly, through serendipitous ignorance or over learning, or deliberately through direct choice and volition. With respect to deliberate practice, I ultimately choose theories and methods that suit my professional purposes and those that sit comfortably with my grasp of theory. This is not an unusual matrix of influences in the realm of theory and practice. However, how and why I, thus positioned, selected and practised the theories and methods cannot be artificially extricated from the I-positions that I take and consequent Me states authored into discourse and therefore phenomenal being. This point is the foundation of the plot of the development of My Career Chapter. The authoring of a Me, the telling of that Me, and the writing of that Me, is the essence of its existence.

My affinity with narrative theory broadly, and moreover, Theory of Dialogical Self specifically, was not simply due to their technical characteristics. The Theory of Dialogical Self speaks of constructs and notions that give voice, text and position to my own phenomenology as it is in the reality of my authored worlds of psychological science and counselling practice. It is this capacity of giving voice, text and position that is vital to the story.

I have authored myself as being a middle-class man who, as a youngster, grew up in a world established upon relative grounds of class division; dialect and dialogue were tantamount to the currency of social identity and success. To transcend this discursive caste, I, positioned as a Nietzsche's "Übermensch"—poorly translated as superman—reaping my own biography (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 238), have authored, by willing myself to be, a Me who has imposed himself on the world and brought himself into being by creating his own autobiography through struggle. The pain of ostracism, of wanting to be accepted, to be heard, was sung out and made meaningful through music. Eliza Doolittle is my metaphor. The young woman who positioned herself in society through her dialogue became anew upon her democratic will and the kindly benevolence of significant others. Like Eliza, I, through the immersion and placement in multiple and cross cultural and discursive positions, became able to author bicultural Me states. The crossing of classes was ultimately manifest in my transition into a middle-class profession, replete with its own discourse of which I now confidently wield across many positions; and now, on the other side, I, the working-class boy made good, positioned as liberal-democrat, construe it to be a moral duty to work hard to help others to cross the class divide and to recreate egalitarianism each day of my work. This theme requires the selection and application of theories and practices which would give voice to my clients and open new avenues for them to learn other ways of telling their stories and, moreover, recreating their stories. It means creating systems that assist them to tell their story anew; just like Eliza.

This narrative account exemplifies dialogical self at work: I multiply positioned, reflexively bringing that theory to a life, and moreover, to a practice of the profession. It exemplifies one approach to the process of developing meaning for career through *story* (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and *life themes* (Savickas, 2005). This dimension of the results of the autoethnographic study alludes to consistent plots and themes in my life, which, in turn, have brought a meaningful account to the development of My Career Chapter. My *life theme* of personal struggle and the plot to overcome adversity through biculturalism was expressed through my use of dialogue as a vehicle for change. Such a powerful personal way of being would inevitably leak into my practices as member of an ethnographic group (e.g., scientist-practitioner, psychologist, career counsellor) and my continuing commitment to individual emancipation and social justice in my professional work, particularly supporting rural Australians transit into and through higher education.

Upon convergence of these personal themes and plot, the STF, Theory of Career Construction, the Theory of Dialogical Self, and the idea of My Career Chapter emerged from the crucible. The idea that emerged was to create:

- (a) a process in which individuals could write and speak their stories;
- (b) a storying process through which the influences in the STF are used as a guide;
- (c) a process using a sentence-completion method that would stimulate the writing process for those who had not the words to start; and
- (d) a process in which clients' dialogical selves could be authored, by writing and speaking, across time and made spatial through structure of the STF influences.

Successfully generating these criteria into a form would mean the speaking and writing of a *chronotope* who would come into voice, and therefore existence, in the counselling sessions.

Thus created, My Career Chapter proffers an alternative form of constructivist career assessment and counselling.

#### 4. Discussion

My Career Chapter was not conceived and constructed within the intellectual confines of scientific and technical literature and an environmental context of a psychometric laboratory. Rather than dress up the construction of My Career Chapter in the illusions of psychometry and scientism, this paper set out to describe the unique human experience that contextualises its development. As such, the paper presents a study of how one *scientist-practitioner* made sense of his personal and professional experiences through autobiographical narratives (Baumeister & Newman, 1994) using the critically reflexive research method of autoethnography.

By describing the nexus of the personal and professional, I set out to establish an allusion that the science and practice of vocational psychology is not necessarily constrained to the ideal of the *scientist-practitioner* model. Whilst I laud the value of scientific vocational psychology, I concomitantly challenge its mystique and pretensions through this study by documenting one example of the profoundly personal dimensions of the science and the practice. Such critical, reflexive questioning is necessary when one understands that the psychology of work and occupation cannot be quarantined from ordinary life (Richardson, 1993), and is cognisant of the potentially pernicious nexus of psychological science, industry and practice (cf., McIlveen & Patton, 2006) and the inevitable presence of one's culture in professional practice (Watson, 2006).

My own personal transition from working-class boy and labourer to psychologist and academic is reflected in the qualitative, grounded theory study of disadvantaged individuals who similarly made class-transitions into roles as counselling academics, with their concomitant development of bicultural and tricultural capacities (Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006). In my own case, I feel bicultural due to my capacity to speak and live the two dialects of rural working-class and metropolitan, educated middle-class. Hence, I am professionally interested in the power of dialogue, discourse and narrative in determining a person's career and identity.

This study complied with recommended procedures for autoethnography (e.g., Anderson, 2006) and approached standards for qualitative research (e.g., Morrow, 2005; Parker, 2004). It could have been improved; perhaps by the addition of other forms of data so as to evocatively engage the reader (Ellis, 2000). Autoethnography may include images (e.g., diagrams, photographs) or other means of expression (e.g., conversations, poetry). For example, I pursued verification of my account and manuscript through colleagues and friends; and inclusion of their responses to my account and manuscript would have enriched its veracity and breadth. Space limitations partially account for the decision not to include their statements. However, I chose not to include the additional data as means of drawing an ethical boundary to prevent unnecessary exposure of their personal lives (Medford, 2006) and to guard against my own anxiety of transgressing personal and professional boundaries—indeed, a thorny issue inherent to autoethnography.

Whilst autoethnography is an uncommon research method within the psychology and the career development literature, it offers considerable promise as a vehicle for sharing practices that are grounded in theory and the unique framework of an individual practitioner. From the perspective of Polkinghorne's arguments (1992) and narratology (Hoshmand, 2005), autoethnography offers practitioners a means of contributing to theory and practice whilst remaining genuine to their individual self and practice contexts. Its application in this study as a means of understanding the construction of a tool for counselling, exemplifies the

broader human issues that surround the development and application of such products and processes of the career development industry.

Future research using autoethnography may reveal how other practitioners apply My Career Chapter in context of their unique professional setting (e.g., school or prison) or alternative theoretical preferences through which the co-construction of a client's dialogical autobiography would be viewed as a shared action and project (e.g., Bass & Hosking, 1998; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002). Apart from elucidating the procedure's relevance to different contexts, this type of autoethnographic enquiry may add alternative dimensions to the critique of the *scientist-practitioner* through analysis of the confluence of the client and practitioner at work together.

But, is autoethnography nothing but self-centred naval-gazing? Like others (e.g., Bochner, 2001; Vickers, 2002), I argue otherwise. The gap between theory and practice has been lamented in vocational psychology and career development (Patton & McMahon, 2006). There has, nevertheless, been considerable theoretical work done to close the divide between the science and practice of counselling psychology (e.g., Murdock, 2006) and the arguments in that literature apply equally well to that of vocational psychology. Yet these attempts persist in using an "over-there" conceptualization of the problem, rather than positioning the problem within the realm of the person-the-practitioner per se. Autoethnography is a research methodology that can bridge the so-called divide between science and practice by laying the practitioner as the metaphorical bridge.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the paragons of traditional career development theory and practice did not produce their technologies through purely objective analysis of extant literature. Perhaps they had a light bulb moment, a maniacal surge of creative thinking, or an epiphany whilst walking the dog or singing in the shower, and then engaged in the accepted practice of creating, post hoc, a scientific story of how their instruments were built from the ground up using the latest scientific research—which of course always makes for good journal copy. Ethnographically speaking, the theorists of psychology are, and were, ineluctably immersed in their own culture and history. Unless the unique, creative stories of *scientist-practitioners* are told, the discipline of vocational psychology and its attendant professions will be none the wiser, as a rich source of embedded theory and practice will be lost. It is asserted here, therefore, that autoethnography may offer a means of recording and learning from that history and narrative, and thence contributing to the corpus of literature.

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