

## Identifying and Dealing with the Adaptability Needs of an Unwed Pregnant Teenager

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**This article describes a way of identifying and dealing with the adaptability needs of a pregnant teenager from a life design perspective. The participant was selected purposively from among a group of undergraduate students at an institution for unwed mothers. The intervention involved life design counselling and occurred over a period of three months. Data on participant adaptability needs to facilitate life design counselling were gathered using the Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, as well as qualitative techniques (including the Career Interest Profile, a genogram, a lifeline, a collage, idioms and role models). Following the intervention, the participant revealed heightened self-insight with regard to her personal experiences, a ‘changed’ experience in respect of certain aspects of her context and pro-active behaviour with regard to the challenges she was facing. The process of life design can have a positive effect on an unwed pregnant teenager.**

*Keywords: life design counselling, career construction, postmodern career facilitation, unwed pregnant teenager, postmodern techniques, future aspirations*

In the 21st century, the youth have little choice but to prepare themselves for issues of restructuring and transformation in the workplace. According to Hamman and Hendricks (2005), adolescence is when young people first search for continuity and acceptance by the peer group. Continuity refers to adolescents’ need to know who they are in the here and now, how they arrived in the here and now and who they will be in the future. Adolescents are also faced with the challenge of projecting themselves into the future so that they can make sound life-shaping decisions regarding possible occupations and future lives.

Unwed teenagers, too, have to deal with these developmental challenges. Apart from having to adapt their view of themselves in the here and now to include their pregnancy and how their condition will inform decisions they have to make, they also have to adjust this view in such a way that it can be projected into the future to shape their career and life decisions. The question therefore arises as to how adolescent pregnant girls could adapt to their situation in a way that will help them shape their careers and lives effectively. A career construction approach appears to hold great promise with early parenthood teenagers.

### Career Construction: Theory and Model

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) offers a framework for understanding career behaviour, career choices and career development. The theory views development as adaptation to the environment rather than as the maturing of internal structures. Adaptability and development comprise four core concepts: life structure, career personality, career adaptability and life role (Savickas, 2005; 2009b). Careers are shaped during the adaptation process by the choices people make in order to adapt to their environments. Thus, career counselling becomes social co-construction of meaning, and the subjective

meanings people attach to their experiences are considered central to career construction. During career construction, significant social meanings are realized (Blustein, Palladino, & Flum, 2004).

**A life design counselling perspective.** During life design counselling, the principles of career construction are applied to assessment and intervention praxis. The counsellor interprets the information provided by the client as a meaningful, comprehensive story (Hartung, 2007). The counsellor also attempts to understand the impact of all aspects of the client’s life on his or her career (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a; b). Clients are encouraged to design preferred futures. The design should take into consideration all the different roles people have to fulfil as well as the different systems and contexts they are a part of (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a; b).

**Relevance of the concept ‘adaptability’ for 21st century career counselling.** Adaptability is a critical construct in career construction theory that is used to explain career development (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2008). By stressing adaptability, career counsellors can concentrate on preparing clients to cope with change (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a, 2004b; Savickas, 1997). Adaptability also correlates positively with the rapid changes in technology and the economy (Savickas, 1997).

**Dimensions of career adaptability.** The dimensions of career construction theory focus on the developmental tasks and role transitions as well as the coping strategies of individuals to negotiate various transitions and changes. According to Hartung (2007), career adaptability is the origin of particular attitudes, beliefs and competencies, and each adaptability transaction should strengthen and improve the individual’s ability to adapt (Savickas, 2003). Savickas (2005) and (Savickas et al., 2009) identify four dimensions of adaptability - concern, control, curiosity and confidence - with each referring to a specific developmental task. These dimensions represent the general adapt-

ability resources and strategies used by individuals to manage critical tasks, transitions and traumas during the process of career construction (Hartung, 2007).

**Career concern.** The first and most important dimension of career adaptability is people's concern with their own future careers. Career concern refers to the belief that people have a future that is worth preparing for and that such preparation will enhance their future.

**Career control.** A feeling of optimism about future careers can lead to concern about who owns people's future. Career control means that people believe that they themselves are responsible for the construction of their careers.

**Career curiosity.** Career curiosity refers to feelings of industriousness and inquisitiveness to learn more about types of occupations individuals may be interested in as well as the opportunities that accompany such occupations. Career curiosity, according to Hartung (2007), refers to productive career investigation and a realistic approach to the future.

**Career confidence.** Career confidence has two closely related components: an increase in problem-solving capabilities and the belief that people can act effectively.

**Adaptability and unwed pregnant teenagers.** Brosh, Weigel and Evans (2007) found a positive correlation between inadequate educational and occupational performance and the incidence of teenage pregnancy. It therefore seems likely that enhanced educational and occupational performance may lessen the chance of teenagers falling pregnant prematurely. During the adolescent developmental phase, teenagers are confronted with the tasks of exploration and decision making and of moving from dependence to relative independence and autonomy as individuals (Ackerman, 2005). These tasks reflect the dimensions of adaptability delineated above and indicate the importance of helping teenagers who are at risk of falling pregnant prematurely to work through these developmental tasks more satisfactorily and so decrease their chances of falling pregnant. In line with the goal of this study, a pregnant teenager's educational and occupational aspirations were therefore looked at from the perspective of her adaptability needs.

### Aim of the Study

The aim of this case study was to investigate the usefulness of a life design approach to help counsellors identify and deal with the adaptability needs of a pregnant teenager from a life design perspective. The study sought to answer the following questions.

- How can a life design approach be applied in the case of a young, unwed, pregnant girl who seeks career counselling?
- How can career counselling facilitate a young, unwed, pregnant girl's reflection on and analysis of her adaptability needs to address career goals?
- Can the use of a life design approach help the career adaptation of a young unwed, pregnant girl in career counselling?

## Method

### Participant and Context

The investigation was based on an interpretivist paradigm (Patton & McMahon, 1999) involving understanding and interpreting meanings revealed during interactions. The mode of inquiry was qualitative (Creswell, 2007; Durrheim, 1999) in nature and comprised a case study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Nieuwenhuis, 2007a, 2007b; Whitley, 2002). The participant (Grace<sup>1</sup>) was a purposefully selected (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a,

2007b) unwed pregnant teenager as the selection criteria called for such a person who was seeking career counselling.

### Procedure: Multi-method Data-Gathering Plan

**Ethics.** Steps were taken to ensure Grace's wellbeing throughout the study. Her informed consent was obtained, and full confidentiality was maintained. She was given feedback by the researchers during all the phases of the inquiry. The research findings were released in an acceptable and responsible manner (Whitley, 2002).

**Psychometric instruments.** The psychometric tests used in the study were the *Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI)* (Briggs & Briggs Myers, 1994) (this test was standardised in South Africa and satisfactory psychometric properties were reported) and the *Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory* (Savickas, 2009c). Because the latter test is in the process of being standardised globally, its results were interpreted qualitatively only. The tests were scored by an independent person who was 'blind' to the study.

**Qualitative techniques.** Qualitative data were gathered during in-depth (one-to-one, semi-structured) interviews and discussions with Grace and by observing her. The following techniques were employed to facilitate data collection: the *Collage*, the *Career Interest Profile* (Maree, 2010), the life line technique (Cochran, 1997), and the life-story interview (Hartung, 2010; Savickas, 2009a, 2009b) as well as informal questionnaires.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

A deductive approach was followed in the data analysis. The data were evaluated and categorised according to predetermined categories found in the literature (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). In the deductive analysis, the four core dimensions of adaptability identified in the *Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory*, namely *concern*, *control*, *curiosity* and *confidence* (Savickas et al., 2009), were used as the predetermined categories. The template style of data analysis used in the study depended on these four predetermined themes (Hartung, 2007; Hartung et al., 2008; Savickas, 2003; 2005; Watson & Stead, 2006).

An inductive data analysis approach was followed to identify subthemes of the four predetermined themes referred to above (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

**Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness was ensured in the study by using various strategies during the data collection and analysis. Issues of credibility, confirmability, transferability, dependability, as well as triangulation and crystallisation were addressed (Table 1).

**Credibility.** Credibility (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) was facilitated by prolonged engagement with Grace in the field and close observation of her over time. The data obtained, the methods used and the decisions made during the research were documented in detail.

**Confirmability.** The data obtained, the methods used and the decisions made during the project were documented in detail.

**Transferability.** The present study is based on comprehensive and extensive descriptions of the participant, and no generalisations were made. Observations were documented in a researcher journal, and detailed descriptions were given of Grace's particular situation and the techniques used. Ample information was provided on the particular context of the case to enable readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other known settings.

**Dependability.** The data were coded independently by an external coder to enhance the deductive process and to ensure that themes obtained during inductive data analysis were an accurate representation of the data.

**Triangulation and crystallisation.** Different quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methods were used to facilitate triangulation (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) and crystallisation (Richardson in Janesick, 2000) and thus enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Table 1 lists the strategies used to guarantee the quality of the study.

### Intervention

Savickas et al. (2009) maintain that the new social arrangement of work poses a series of questions and challenges to people who attempt to be useful to others as they develop their working lives. These authors explain that life designing for career intervention is based on five assumptions about people and their working lives, namely (a) contextual possibilities, (b) dynamic processes, (c) non-linear progression, (d) multiple perspectives and (e) personal patterns. Because their life design framework for career counselling incorporates Guichard's (2005) theory of self-constructing and Savickas' (2005) theory of career construction – both of which describe occupational behaviour and its development – it is structured to be life-long, holistic, contextual and preventive. Counselling is seen as an uninterrupted, interactive process that never stands apart from emotions and feelings; a process that facilitates problem solving and decision making within the context in which people live and develop (Duarte, 2009; 2010).

A life design counselling process was developed and implemented once a week over a three-month period (Hansen, 2010). The intervention model for life designing rests on stories and activities instead of focusing merely on test scores and profile interpretations. Briefly summarised, the strategy has six general steps that are informed by and tailored on the idiosyncratic reality represented by the unique experience of each person. First, the problem needs to be defined by both the counsellor and clients and their hopes regarding what they hope to achieve during counselling need to be established. During the next step (once the problem and the problem context have been identified), the client is en-

couraged to explore the system that shapes his or her subjective identity. During the third step in the life design intervention process, the counsellor and the client focus on widening the perspectives of the client. The story needs to be revised, after which the fourth step occurs: the client places the existing problem within his or her revised story. In the penultimate step, the client is encouraged to identify activities he or she can carry out to and actualise his or her new identity. The last (sixth) step comprises short-term and long-term follow-ups.

The intervention in the study incorporated postmodern career facilitation techniques (Cochran, 1997) to enhance Grace's involvement in her life design process and to facilitate co-constructive conversation.

### Data Analysis

Verbatim responses from the sessions with Grace will be given to illustrate the confirmation of significant themes. The identified themes will be discussed according to the stages of the life design counselling process. An uninterrupted text would have reflected the interconnectedness of the data and the themes more suitably, but we distinguished between the stages in order to promote easier understanding of the text and to facilitate referencing. By discussing the data according to the different stages rather than the individual sessions, we attempted to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the themes while addressing the central theme, namely the handling of adaptability needs from a life design perspective.

### Results

The themes are discussed according to the following stages: (a) construction of working alliance, (b) mapping and exploration of a system of subjective identity forms, (c) opening of perspectives, discovering, rewriting, reorganising and revision of life stories, (d) placing the problem in a new story and perspective, (e) specification and selection of activities that investigate issues surrounding identity and, lastly, (f) a follow-up session.

A summary of the main themes that were confirmed and the subthemes that emerged during the life design counselling pro-

Table 1

#### *Strategies to Enhance Trustworthiness During Data Collection and Analysis*

Credibility	Prolonged engagement in the field took place, and numerous observations were made over time. Continuous observation of Grace was carried out during the research phases.
Confirmability	The data obtained, the methods used and the decisions made during the project were documented in detail.
Transferability	Observations were documented in a research diary. Detailed descriptions were given of Grace's particular setting and the techniques used - sufficient information was provided on the context of the research for readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other known settings.
Dependability	The data were coded independently by an external coder in order to enhance their accuracy. Verbatim accounts were produced (low inference descriptor).
Triangulation	Many types of evidence were collected for diverging and converging of evidence (Golafshani, 2003; Stake, 2005).
Crystallisation	The focus was on attempting to confirm that data obtained during the current data collection and analysis confirmed the patterns and themes identified in the literature (Savickas, 2009a; 2009c) to enhance a broad understanding of the adaptability needs of an unwed, pregnant teenager.

*Note.* Compiled from Creswell, 2003, pp. 196–197; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, pp. 407–408.

cess, as well as the sources of information, is given below in Table 2.

### Construction of a Working Alliance

An important goal of life design counselling is to facilitate insight and agency in the client's own context (Savickas et al., 2009). During the construction of a working alliance, attempts are consequently made to help people develop effective strategies for problem solving, plans of action and general life design (Savickas et al., 2009). It was explained to Grace in this study that she alone was the architect of her life (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a, 2004b) but that the counsellor would work with her to co-construct an ideal future and to design a preferred life. Grace eventually took ownership of the process. Her answer to the question: *Can you do whatever you want to do?* was *Only when things go right* (b.iv). She then added, *Things go right only when I make them go right* (b.iv).

Grace faced several unique challenges. The most prominent of these, according to her, was her pregnancy: *Getting pregnant while I'm at school*. Not only was her educational career seriously disrupted, she also felt disappointed by the turn her life had taken. She expressed the wish to *get on my way again, make money and make my life simpler and more manageable*. Although Grace would have preferred to pass Grade 12 as soon as she could, she decided not to go back to school until after the birth of her baby. Her future after the birth of the baby was particularly unsure because of her family's inability to support her.

Grace's descriptions of her family revealed a history of broken and inadequate relationships. Because both of her parents were alcoholics, she lived with her grandmother: *I would rather live with my magogo because my parents are alcoholics*. Grace's grandmother was unemployed, and, as a result, they lived in abject poverty. Grace nevertheless remained optimistic and hopeful: *I will cope with things, you know, as long as I have a warm family* (a.iv). Sadly, though, this was not an outlook anchored in reality. During the process of (re-)designing her life, an important goal was consequently to help her form a more realistic view of her family context so that she could identify and address the attendant challenges. Because of the complexity of her situation, this was a sensitive and long-term process that fell outside the boundaries of the current study.

According to Duarte (2010), the counsellor should attempt to clarify the client's different roles during the establishment of a working alliance. Grace recognised that she would soon have to take on the additional role of a mother but denied that this would influence her situation: *I want to achieve everything even though I'm a mother, young girl* (d.iv). *It is nothing to worry about*. She felt optimistic about the impending change: *I will cope with it, you know* (a.iv) but could not connect this optimism to a real future that could be approached in a carefully planned manner (Hartung, 2007). One of the goals of life design in the study would therefore be to clarify Grace's role as a single mother. The achievement of this goal would help Grace approach her future with planfulness and ground her optimism in reality (Savickas, 2003).

### Mapping and Exploration of Subjective Identity Forms

During this stage, Grace's subjective identity forms were investigated in order to analyse the identity image she had constructed of herself in different contexts (Guichard, 2009). Thus, a bridge was built between her experiences (past and present) and future expectations as well as her attempts to establish an

own identity and realise her potential. During this process, her imagination and investigation of possible selves were encouraged (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

A unique challenge Grace faced was her experience of isolation and loneliness, which applied to her school as well as family contexts. Regarding school, she observed: *I have a best friend, but she is not there at the school*. Regarding her family context, she remarked: *But they were not there, I was always alone*. Grace's isolation and resultant lack of support were evident in her having to adapt to extremely difficult circumstances, including the real danger of being raped, without any support from her parents. When Grace and *magogo* stayed with family for a brief period, rape became an even greater danger. Yet family members remained uninvolved and unconcerned. Notwithstanding Grace's warnings and fears, no adult family member listened to her, even when a *dangerous man* raped one of her cousins. Grace said the following about one of her role models (Oprah Winfrey): *She knows what questions to ask. She always talks on behalf of those who have no voice*. Her experiences regarding the rape of her cousin mirrored her opinion of what her role model would have done to handle this kind of situation: Grace also tried to speak on behalf of her younger cousins, a characteristic that resonated with her core self and became part of her construction of her identity image (Savickas et al., 2009). Grace's experiences at school also reflected loneliness and isolation: *Sometimes at school I am embarrassed by some people. They ask me to write on a chalk board for teacher but when I get up they call me names that embarrass me ... yet, I do it* (d.i). A more recent school experience that Grace wove into her narrative was her Grade 11 failure: *I am sorry to admit that I failed grade 11 and her academic problems: I feel very incompetent when I am expected to do class work. I don't always understand and it is difficult to find help* (c.i).

Grace's current identity image reflected her situation and her hope to survive: *I will cope* (a.iv) and *I just have to cope, you know* (a.iv). This view of herself as someone who could cope with difficult situations was shaped to a large extent by her earlier experiences of surviving rejection, loneliness and a hostile environment devoid of any support (Savickas et al., 2009). This identity image was strengthened by her favourite saying (her advice to herself): *Strive to survive* (a.iv). Grace linked her striving for survival to hope and optimism: *Do what you do with all your power and in the hope that things will change. You can survive anything* (a.iv) and *You can always like, you know, strive to do something better. You must hope your actions will make your future better. You must do what you do with hope. You must strive* (a.ii). However, she provided some indication of her incipient realisation that her hope and optimism were not anchored in a real future or planful attitude: *Things do not always happen; others often don't know you and what you do but you have to keep on hoping to achieve* (a.iv). Her identity image of someone who could survive difficult circumstances was built almost exclusively on the frail foundation of hope.

A gap existed between Grace's existing identity image and her looked-for identity. Her expectations, framed by her background, were of

- financial and social success – *This will be my car [pointing at pictures in her collage] and i-phone. I will look so beautiful and I will invite my friends to come and enjoy* (d.iv). *I want to achieve everything even though I'm a mother, a young girl* (d.iv);

Table 2

*Identified Themes Based on the literature*

Themes and subthemes identified	Source of information
<b>Main theme: a. Concern</b>	
Subthemes	
a.i. Concern with career future	<i>Collage</i> Idioms <i>Career Interest Profile</i> (Maree, 2010)
a.ii. Positive attitude towards the future	Idioms
a.iii. Anticipations	<i>MBTI</i> (Briggs & Briggs Myers, 1994) Role models Life line
a.iv. Optimism/Hope	Role models <i>Collage</i> Idioms <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
a.v. Planfulness	Idioms <i>Career Interest Profile</i> (Maree, 2010)
<b>Main theme: b. Control</b>	
Subthemes	
b.i. Independence	Role models <i>Collage</i> Life line <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
b.ii. Interpersonal autonomy	Role models <i>Collage</i> Idioms <i>areer Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
b.iii. Intrapersonal willpower	Life line <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
b.iv. Responsibility for/Ownership of the future	Idioms Life line
<b>Main theme: c. Curiosity</b>	
Subthemes	
c.i. Self-knowledge	Role models <i>Collage</i> <i>Career Interest Profile</i> (Maree, 2010) Life line <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
c.ii. Open attitude regarding new experiences	<i>MBTI</i> (Briggs & Briggs Myers, 1994) Idioms
<b>Main theme: d. Confidence</b>	
Subthemes	
d.i. Problem-solving abilities	<i>Collage</i> Life line
d.ii. Self-acceptance	Role models Life line
d.iii. Self-worth	Role models Life line <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)
d.iv. Expectation of success	<i>Collage</i> <i>Career Interest Profile</i> (Maree, 2010) <i>Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory</i> (Savickas, 2009c)

- acknowledgement – *I would like it if one day, somewhere, in my career, I could be in front of many people. They will promote me for dealing with difficulty at work* (a.i);
- an end to her isolation – *I wish I could be one of them, of the team and be able to encourage others* (a.i).

### Opening of Perspectives, Discovering, Rewriting, Reorganising and Revision of Life Stories

During this stage, Grace's life story was repeated and rewritten based on the information gleaned during the first two stages. She was tactfully informed that pursuing her two envisaged fields of study, namely geology and veterinary science, as possible career paths were unrealistic options at this stage. Instead, she had to establish some normality in her life first, after which she could attempt to pursue viable career options. Great care was taken to prevent Grace from seeing herself as a failure and to support her in identifying her strong points and perceiving her weak points as possible strengths.

- Grace summarised her strong points as follows:
- Life sciences. I should pass (c.i).
- I can write a song and add music to it as well (c.i).
- Young children like to play with me (c.i).
- Additional strong points included:
- Self-knowledge
- Anticipation of events
- Problem-solving skills
- Grace also identified the following weak points.
- I feel lonely at school. My friend was moved to another class. But I still strive (a.iv).
- I would like to be less self-centred (c.i).

Although identified as a weak point, Grace's loneliness seemed to be contextual rather than chosen. To help her establish a sense of normality, her feelings of loneliness had to be dealt with. According to Savickas et al. (2009), people's self-concepts can change only through new experiences and by observing others. The context of Grace's interactions therefore had to be widened to give her an opportunity to design a more complex identity image than the existing image, which centred on survival. During life design counselling, Grace took part in activities that provided meaning and encouraged her to construct a new view of herself (Duarte, 2010) (see the next section).

### Placing of the Problem in a New Story and Perspective

During this stage, Grace reinterpreted her future expectations and possible outcomes (Duarte, 2010). The reinterpretation of her situation offered her an exciting new perspective: the affirmation of her ability to realise her preferred identity: *I want to achieve everything even though I'm a mother, a young girl* (d.iv).

Grace perceived her pregnancy as the biggest obstacle to realising her potential: *Getting pregnant while I'm at school is my biggest problem*. However, it was pointed out to her that the part of her life story that involved her pregnancy had the potential to be rewritten. The paternal grandmother of Grace's baby, for instance, showed genuine concern about Grace. This relationship provided Grace with an opportunity to experience support, to observe a potential role model and therefore to change her self-concept in a positive way (Savickas, 2005). It would, af-

ter all, be possible for her to find her way again: *There is still a future for me. After having had the baby I can still have my life* (a.i).

### Specification and Selection of Activities that Investigate Issues Surrounding Identity

During this stage Grace, and the researchers decided on ways to actualise her co-constructed life design, which included developing her capacity to act in a more predetermined manner by thinking before acting and by learning from her mistakes. She decided to start with work analysis in order to become more aware of the realistic educational and career choices she had to make, to anticipate possible life choices, to work perseveringly and patiently, to act in the interests of herself and her child, and to take charge of her future by considering several career alternatives. The initial goals were looked at again, and general self-reflection was facilitated.

Specific activities that Grace and the researchers decided on:

- Starting and maintaining an emotional calendar (Maree, 2008)
- A letter to herself as an adult and mother of a five-year-old child
- A letter to her unborn child
- A letter to the father of her child
- Continuing her life line into the future
- The completion of her life chapters

### Follow-up Session

Since life design is considered a lifelong process, the researchers were at pains to stress that the responsibility to actively design her life rested with Grace alone. A month after the initial sessions, Grace reported that she had started doing job analyses and volunteering at a kindergarten during the mornings. She was beginning to consider primary school teaching as a career option. She said that she was maintaining an emotional calendar but was finding it difficult to always identify the reason for the emotion she was experiencing. She reported that she had enjoyed writing the letters but admitted to have written only to her unborn child as yet. She was encouraged to write down her thoughts, even if not in letter format.

At the time of these discussions, Grace's life was focused primarily on the birth of her baby. She said she hoped to pay more attention to her educational and occupational decisions after the birth of her child.

### Discussion

The qualitative, descriptive and explorative nature of the study contributed to the rich and dense description of the phenomenon under investigation (namely how to identify and deal with the adaptability needs of an unwed pregnant teenager) to a certain extent. From the descriptive data obtained, life design counselling appears to be a promising strategy that could have a lasting effect on an unwed pregnant adolescent. The postmodern techniques implemented in the study also apparently enhanced Grace's involvement in the life design process. The potential of life design counselling was highlighted by Grace's changed experience.

Life design counselling is described by researchers (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a, 2004b; Savickas et al., 2009; Zunker,

1998) as an effective strategy for designing an individual's life. Such a strategy can evidently change as unique challenges, experiences and needs arise. This description is largely confirmed by the present case study.

The point of departure in the study was that adaptability needs that may be experienced by an unwed pregnant teenager can be addressed in a constructive manner through a co-constructive life design process. The study revealed the unique nature of the participant's context, the interdependent relationship between the participant and the different systems in which her life was interwoven, the subjective meaning attached to experience and the challenges currently experienced by her as an unwed pregnant teenager. After a three-month period, the participant showed a willingness to accept personal responsibility for her future. In addition, she showed signs of a new hope for her future as is evident from the following remark.

*The sky is still the limit ... I want to achieve my dreams even though I will be a mother. I will always continue to strive for what I want because I don't want to give up anything about my future.*

### Recommendations

Further research in this field is essential as we believe the findings may have implications for the practice of career counselling in various settings. Firstly, psychologists-in-training will benefit from the inclusion in curricula of life design counselling that incorporates the six phases outlined in this article. By applying the life design approach explicated here, based on the information gained from administering the data collection techniques discussed, psychologists can facilitate clients' personal agency more effectively than would otherwise have been the case. Secondly, practising psychologists will probably require training in this approach as well. Thirdly, most psychologists who administer (career) counselling, irrespective of whether they are prospective or practising psychologists, will probably need training in postmodern developments in career construction counselling for life designing in order to align the practice in (South) Africa with what is happening elsewhere in the world. Fourthly, psychologists should be trained to administer the life designing approach described here in (small) group settings that protect people's privacy and integrity (Hartung, 2010) and enhance their ability to examine their strengths and weaknesses. Fifthly, psychologists may have to refer clients to appropriate health professionals if major pathology emerges, prior to embarking on career counselling per se. Sixthly, psychologists are encouraged to build on this study, which confirms the merits of a combined quantitative-qualitative approach to (career) counselling in facilitating a deeper understanding of the value of finding personal meaning, taking on personal agency, striving actively towards personal growth and (co-) construction of a career and design of a life, as well as acceptance of personal responsibility in the (career) counselling process. Psychologists are encouraged to conduct research in this field and to report on their findings in scholarly journals and at psychology conferences.

### Limitations

Because only one case study was investigated, the extent of the study and generalisation to other settings were limited. Although steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, the subjective interpretation of the researchers could be regarded as a limitation.

### Projection

Grace is now, three months after the beginning of the life design process, better equipped to start confronting the complexities of her life. She appears motivated to realise specific goals that could stand her in good stead in her career development. The transcriptions of the conversations with Grace show the effectiveness of using a life design counselling process to augment the design of a person's life. For instance, exploring Grace's past experiences, identifying her role models and discussing her success stories and strong (and weak) points resulted in an increased awareness by her of her socialisation needs and abilities, possibly resulting in the positive behaviour she demonstrated. These conversations could also have contributed to the heightened self-insight she revealed with regard to her experiences and perceptions.

We did not, however, 'prove' that life design counselling is the 'only' or 'best' method to implement in counselling processes or that it is the only solution to the barriers individuals in similar circumstances may experience. In order to determine the broader applicability, flexibility and effectiveness of a life design counselling process, it will be necessary to repeat this study with a bigger population and culturally diverse groups. We do, nevertheless, hope that this study will make a small contribution towards a better understanding of a pregnant unwed adolescent's experiences, specifically with regard to career adaptability needs.

### Conclusion

We believe that the scope of psychology, and not only life design counselling, should be broadened to include the full spectrum of diversity in South Africa (e.g., social status, gender, religion, creed and race) with the emphasis on actively engaging people in constructing personal meanings and planning for the future (Amundson, 2003; Watson & Stead, 2006). The fact that an unwed, pregnant adolescent took part in the study is therefore of little importance. Furthermore, in attempting to facilitate career adaptability, psychologists should view all clients as active agents in their own personal development: counselling should therefore continue to address the needs and diversity of individual persons. Putting into practice the shift in emphasis internationally from stressing career adaptability instead of career maturity during career counselling in local contexts seems viable, timely and advisable.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym is used in the case study.

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