AN INVESTIGATION INTO

MY CAREER CHAPTER: A DIALOGICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This dissertation is a report on research into the development and evaluation of a career assessment and counselling procedure that falls under the aegis of the constructivist, narrative approach: *My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography*. *My Career Chapter* enables an individual to construct a holistic understanding of his or her career. The procedure facilitates an individual writing and reflecting on an autobiographical account of his or her career that is contextualised amidst systems of career influences. The resulting autobiographical text can be used in career counselling, including co-constructive dialogue between client and counsellor. The literature underpinning the research project is described with a wide-ranging discussion of issues that critically pertain to the research endeavour and essentially provide a primary base for the work. Two theoretical frameworks that exemplify constructivism in vocational psychology underpin the research: the Systems Theory Framework and the Theory of Career Construction. From the base of those two theoretical frameworks, narrative career counselling is explicated and exemplars are described. The Theory of Dialogical Self is introduced to inform the design of *My Career Chapter* and, ultimately, the theory and practice of narrative career counselling. The research is predominantly positioned within a paradigm of constructivism/interpretivism and the results of the studies are collectively interpreted accordingly; but postpositivism and critical ideological paradigms are present in a secondary form due to the mixture of research methods used in the project as a whole. Six empirical studies investigate the experience of *My Career Chapter* from the perspective of the developer, the counsellor-user, and the client-user; each explicated with two studies respectively. Research methods include autoethnography for the developer’s experience, interpretative phenomenological...
analysis and focus group for the counsellor-users’ experience, and quasi-experiment and interpretative phenomenological analysis for the client-users’ experience. The studies of the developer’s experience of My Career Chapter comprehensively explicate how and why the procedure was developed and emphasise the importance of reflexive science and practice. Crucially, the autoethnographies revealed a nexus of theory-practice-person which underpins the production of My Career Chapter, and critically influences the entire research project. The studies involving counsellor-users affirmed My Career Chapter’s alignment with recommendations for the development and application of qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures. These studies also raised questions pertaining to the characteristics of client-users that may mediate the efficacy of the procedure (e.g., age, language ability). Studies of client-users firstly support the conclusion that My Career Chapter is a safe career assessment and counselling procedure, with minimal attendant risk of inducing psychological harm or distress. The procedure was experienced as being helpful as a tool for personal reflection, through its theoretically-derived processes of facilitating clients writing, reading, and hearing and talking their autobiographical manuscripts through in the interpretation phase. There are four dimensions of significance associated with this research project. Firstly, the divide between theory and practice has indeed been much lamented in vocational psychology and counselling psychology. Thus, the overall significance of the research reported upon in this dissertation is significant because it attempts to bring theory and practice together through a reflexive and theoretically informed research process into a career assessment and counselling procedure. Secondly, the research and development process produced a new career assessment and counselling product which will add to the limited range of techniques that fall under the aegis of constructivist career assessment and counselling broadly, and the narrative
approach specifically. My Career Chapter complements other procedures. Thirdly, two of the research methods used in the project (viz., autoethnography and interpretative phenomenological analysis) demonstrated their potential as additional qualitative methods for research within vocational psychology. Finally, the research process has enabled the articulation of the Theory of Dialogical Self—from another branch of psychology—into the extant corpus of literature on career development theory and practice.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Peter McIlveen
20 August 2008
List of Peer Reviewed Publications


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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

*End and goal.* Not every end is a goal. The end of a melody is not its goal; but nonetheless, if the melody had not reached its end it would not have reached its goal either. A parable. (Nietzsche, 1977, p. 278)

Career is an inherently personal, yet socially mediated, lifelong experience of self-construction (Guichard, 2005); and career assessment and counselling can play a role in that process of self-construction. One approach to that process of self-construction, narrative career counselling, actively engages the client and counsellor in co-construction of a career-related life-story. Narrative career counselling is relatively new—theoretically and professionally—to the field and is yet to be comprehensively understood in terms of its process and justified in terms of its outcomes. The question “How does narrative career counselling work, theoretically and practically?” remains unanswered. In order to partially address that broad question, this doctoral research project investigates one specific narrative career assessment and counselling procedure, namely, *My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography* (McIlveen, 2006).

*My Career Chapter* (shortened for convenience) is an autobiographical process and is broadly based upon constructivist psychologies (Botella, 1995; Young & Collin, 2004) and specifically operationalises two crucial theoretical frameworks of career, namely, the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) and the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005). My Career Chapter is derived from the philosophical views of the human experience of creating one’s own personal reality, through dialogue, within the scheme of a psychosocial existence and its inherent
limitations upon identity in the world; hence it closely aligns with narrative theories for career (e.g., Hoshmand, 2005). In this narrative frame, the procedure, and this research project, draw upon the psychology of personal identity through articulation of the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992) into vocational psychology.

My Career Chapter complements existing procedures based on similar theoretical tenets: for example My System of Career Influences (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005) which relates to Systems Theory Framework. Yet, they diverge procedurally: with My Career Chapter taking a predominantly verbal and written approach; whereas My System of Career Influences employs extensive use of visual and graphical devices. Unlike other autobiographical procedures with brief or open-ended instructions (e.g., Cochran, 1997), My Career Chapter is highly structured with specific stages and instructions. Hence, My Career Chapter offers an alternative means of engaging with clients and producing autobiographical material for career counselling.

As a new narrative career assessment and counselling procedure, My Career Chapter must be brought under investigation before any claims can be made on its value for clients and practitioners.

Objective of the Research Project

There are very few narrative career assessment and counselling procedures that are explicitly and technically linked to theory, and, moreover, rigorously investigated with respect to the alignment with theory. An exception to that charge is My System of Career Influences (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), which has been variously investigated and tested in the field (McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005). As a theoretically-informed assessment and counselling procedure, the current investigation into My Career Chapter not only provides insight into the procedure itself, but allows
for exploration of the link between theory and practice. As a whole, the research project takes the process (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Swanson, 1995; Whiston & Oliver, 2005) of career assessment and counselling as its core interest, rather than outcomes, and aims to contribute to the literature on process research. Here the term process pertains to an individual’s experience with respect to what her or she thought, felt, and did; whereas outcome pertains his or her constructions of what transpired as a result of their experience of counselling. To that end, the research project is an investigation into the developer’s, the counsellor-users’, and the client-users’ process-related experiences of My Career Chapter. It is purported that a multidimensional understanding of experience will provide a view on the process of My Career Chapter. The research endeavour set out to answer the following questions:

1. How was My Career Chapter developed?
2. How does it manifest and inform theory—pure and applied?
3. How do client-users experience My Career Chapter in career counselling?
4. How do counsellor-users experience My Career Chapter?

Dissertation Outline

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks for Career. The second chapter explores the literature on career development associated with constructivisms. It outlines the two major theoretical frameworks that can subsume narrative career assessment and counselling (viz., Systems Theory Framework and Theory of Career Construction); and ultimately inform the technique under investigation. It introduces the theory that is pivotal to the research: Theory of Dialogical Self.

Chapter Three: Narrative Approaches to Career Counselling. The third chapter extends upon the theoretical frameworks presented in the preceding chapter. It describes the literature pertaining to the narrative approach to career counselling, lays
the groundwork for the method of counselling under investigation, and explicates a synthesis of theory toward a dialogical model of career and career counselling.

Chapter Four: My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography. My Career Chapter is introduced and described so as to provide a brief guide to its theoretical dimensions, layout, structure and process. A copy of My Career Chapter is presented in Appendix B.

Chapter Five: Methodological Considerations. The fifth chapter provides an overview of the research project’s methodology and opens a broader discussion on the epistemological background of the research endeavour; and thus embeds the research methods within their proper frame. Whilst the entire project does not deploy solely qualitative methods, they are used as the primary vehicle for effectively investigating the construction and experience of using My Career Chapter. According to the project’s aim of addressing experience, the Studies’ chapters are respectively organised around three themes of experience pertaining to My Career Chapter: the experiences of the developer, the counsellor-users, and the client-users. This multidimensional analysis of My Career Chapter results in a comprehensive study of its origin, application, and process.

Chapter Six: Developer’s Experience. Study 1 accounted for the creative process and outcome of developing My Career Chapter. This Study used autoethnography as the primary research method and produced a narrative account of the creation. Study 2 described the developer’s experience of using My Career Chapter on himself. Autoethnography was again used, however, it was phenomenologically-oriented to ascertain experience, rather than construct a narrative completed in the first Study.

Chapter Seven: Counsellor-users’ Experience. Study 3 investigated counsellors’ experience of My Career Chapter and their evaluation of its alignment with
a set of recommendations for the design of qualitative assessment procedures.

Methodologically, the Study entailed interpretative phenomenological analysis. Study 4 investigated guidance counsellors’ experience of My Career Chapter in a similar vein, however, used a focus group as the research design.

Chapter Eight: Client-users’ Experience. The final two Studies investigated the clients’ experience of My Career Chapter. Study 5 used a quasi-experimental design to ascertain the users’ reaction to the sentence-completion process only. It was in many respects a pilot study of the manuscript process of My Career Chapter. The final Study expanded the pilot investigation of Study 5 and qualitatively investigated users’ reactions to the complete version of My Career Chapter.

Chapter Nine: Discussion. The final chapter of the dissertation presents a general discussion of the Studies’ outcomes, the conduct of research endeavour, and propositions for theoretical convergence.

Appendix A. The research project and thesis are based upon the paradigm of constructivism and its position within the discipline of psychology, particularly pertaining to the subject of career and attendant professional activities. In order to contextualise that positioning, the dissertation is organised so that this first appendix contains two Parenthetic Considerations. The two essays do not form part of the empirical research project per se and are thus presented in an appendix. The essays are, however, crucial documentation in the process of the research project, and the reader is encouraged at least to give them a passing glance. They were written before the research proper commenced, and were engendered by critical reflection on the literature which inherently contributed to the development of the career counselling technique under investigation in this research and the approach taken in the research. Thus, the essays
are parenthetic in the sense that they bind the thesis within assumptions and perspectives.

*Appendix B.* A full copy of My Career Chapter appears in this appendix.

*Appendix C.* Copies of the consent form, semi-structured interview schedules, and questionnaires, used in this research project are presented in Appendix C.
CHAPTER TWO:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR CAREER

Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognise him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him (James, 1890/1952, p. 189-190).

Within the literature of vocational psychology and career counselling, the terms career and career development have various evolving denotative and connotative meanings (Baruch, 2004; Chen, 1998; Collin & Young, 2000a; Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004; McMahon & Tatham, 2001; Patton & McMahon, 2006a; Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005; Savickas, 2000; Young & Collin, 2000). This is perhaps a testament to the robust diversity of the vocational psychology’s theories and practices, or alternatively, of the field being disparate and segmented (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). Indeed, the very process of conceptualising and defining the terms in the field of vocational psychology can delimit the theoretical and practical manner in which one operationalises concepts such as career and career development (Richardson, 1993, 2000). Aside from the conceptualisations of scholars and practitioners of career development, individuals’ views of career are being encouraged to change from a traditional reliance upon the employer toward a position of independence, individualism (Baruch, 2004; Collin & Watts, 1996; Hall, 2004; Hall & Moss, 1998; Russell, 2001); self-managed career and lifelong employability (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; King, 2004; McKenzie & Wurzburg, 1997; McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003; Thite, 2001); and a deep sense of personal meaning (Chen, 1998, 2001). In all of this
theoretical diversity rest questions pertaining to the theoretical underpinnings and the outcomes and process of career development practices.

This chapter describes two significant theoretical frameworks that can be subsumed under the aegis of the epistemological perspective of contextualism (Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 1986; Lyddon, 1989, 1995), and that are influenced by constructivism and social constructionism: the Systems Theory Framework and the Theory of Career Construction. Of course, these are not the only theories that promulgate a contextualist psychology for understanding career: take for example the Contextual-action Theory of Career (Young & Valach, 1996, 2000, 2004; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002) and the Developmental Contextual Theory of Career (Vondracek & Kawasaki, 1995; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). They are, however, directly pertinent to this research as they are the fundamental theoretical bodies upon which the techniques researched have been formulated. Both offer a contemporary and comprehensive view of career and have potential to develop further the narrative approach to career. Prior to entering into a description of the two theories, the constructivist underpinnings of this research project are briefly described.

A Constructivist Approach to Career

“Who am I?” is a formidable question and one that has received some treatment in the vocational psychology literature on self-identity (e.g., Blustein, 1994; Guichard, 2005; Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). An individual who speaks this question at once talks to himself or herself and to an imagined or real listener in his or her interpersonal environment. According to Wilson and Dunn (2004), knowledge of one’s self, or self-knowledge, is a complex psychological construct and a personally challenging state to attain. As a psychological construct, they argued that empirical psychology has paid it little attention for a host of epistemological reasons, yet they portended a change in the
discipline’s interest. The problematic of identity, or more accurately, the discursive means by which an individual may try to answer it in the setting of career counselling, is core to this research project. This conundrum is addressed by constructivist theories, of which a variety have been identified (Botella, 1995), and collectively referred to as constructivisms (Young & Collin, 2004) in the career development literature.

Assumptions of Constructivisms

Differentiating between the types of constructivist theories is a difficult exercise (Botella, 1995). For example, declaring differential definitions of the terms constructivism and social constructionism is problematic (Young & Collin, 2004) and to do so may be anathema to their epistemological assumptions according to some theorists (Potter, 1996). Furthermore, Reid (2006a) suggested that confusion surrounding some of the constructivist terminology was also possible. Within the special issue of the Journal of Vocational Behavior devoted to constructivism and social constructionism, Young and Collin established parameters of constructivism and social constructivism as the terms relate to career development. Young and Collin (2004) wrote:

[Constructivism] focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes while [social constructionism] emphasizes that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction (p.375).

Put simplistically, constructivist theory emphasises an endogenous perspective of the person, whereas, social constructionist theory focuses on the individual’s interaction with the exogenous (Rigazio-DiGilio, 2001). Young and Collin cautioned their readership that their simple distinction between the two was liable to overlook the variety and differences between and within both, and then went on to provide a
comprehensive analysis of the terms and their articulation within the field of career development. The difference between constructivism and social constructionism is crucial for understanding the difference in emphasis of where an individual’s agency lies. For a social constructionist, an individual certainly creates meaning through engagement in various discourses; however, the extent to which an individual can engage is socially mediated.

Rigazio-DiGilio (2001) also posited the co-constructivist perspective as one that draws from both constructivist and social constructionist perspectives. For the sake of this research, however, only constructivist and social constructionist approaches will be considered here, as it is inherently assumed that there will be an interchange of perspectives. Notwithstanding the diversity of the two perspectives, but for the sake of convenience, Collin and Young subsumed both under the term constructivisms; after the protocol established by Raskin (2002). The following paragraphs provide a differentiation of the two, albeit limited by the constraints of relevance to this thesis, and do not describe an extensive analysis of their respective histories, applications and status. The plural term constructivisms will be used throughout this dissertation when constructivism and social constructionism are under common discussion.

Constructivism is not new and early works can be dated to ancient Chinese and Greek philosophies (Mahoney, 2003). Contemporary constructivism rejects the positivist notion that theory corresponds to objective “out there” reality and instead holds that knowledge is a construction of the mind (Rosen, 1996). Constructivism is an epistemological relative of cognitive psychological science and assumes three components (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992, p. 671):

1. Proactive cognition—the notion that all human knowing is active, anticipatory, and constructive.
2. Self-organising process—the idea that all learning and knowing is comprised of complex developmental and dynamic processes through which the self is organised

3. Primacy of structure—the assumption that all knowing involves tacit, unconscious, or deep structures.

Mahoney and Patterson emphasised an individual’s capacity to act as a self-organising feed-forward system quite capable of transforming his or herself in relationship with the environment he or she operates and adapts. They stress that deep structures do not refer to traditional psychodynamic concepts, but instead to inherent ways of processing information and knowing. In a more recent work, Mahoney (2003) posited the following assumptions:

1. Human experience involves continuous active agency.

2. Much human activity is devoted to ordering processes—the organisational patterning of experience, tacit, and categorical (they depend on contrasts), and they are the essence of meaning making.

3. The organisation of human activity is fundamentally self-referent or recursive, making the body a fulcrum of experiencing and encouraging a deep phenomenological sense of selfhood or personal identity.

4. Self-organising capacities and creations of meaning are strongly influenced by social-symbolic processes; persons exist in living webs of relationships, many of which are mediated by language and symbol systems.

5. Each human life reflects principles of dynamic dialectical development; complex flows among essential tensions (contrasts) are reflected in patterns and cycles of experiencing that can lead to episodes of disorder (disorganisation) and, under some circumstances, the reorganisation
(transformation) of core patterns of activity, including meaning making and both self- and social relationships (p. 5).

An early, comprehensive (cognitive) psychological theory that would fall under the aegis of constructivism was George Kelly’s (1955) *Psychology of Personal Constructs* (Botella, 1995). Though Kelly rejected a purely phenomenological or existential ontology and accepted that there was tangible reality in the world, his theory purported that a person’s unique and meaningful construction of his or her world was pre-eminent in determining personal reality and that this construction was subject to ongoing revision (Bannister & Mair, 1968). Kelly emphasised that the individual does not merely respond cognitively and behaviourally: the individual anticipates. It is this process of anticipation that is fundamental to Kelly’s theory and is a key feature of constructivism. Anticipation requires active, if not pro-active, mental engagement with the world in order for the individual to construct personal reality.

Kelly (Bannister & Mair, 1968; Kelly, 1955) posited corollaries for his theory and they are worth restating because of their presence, in various theoretical forms and expressions, within the literature on constructivism:

1. **Construction corollary**—a person anticipates events by construing their replication.

2. **Individuality corollary**—persons differ from each other in their construction of events.

3. **Organisation corollary**—each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs.

4. **Dichotomy corollary**—a person’s construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.
5. Choice corollary—a person chooses for himself that alternative in a
dichotomised construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility
for the elaboration of the system.

6. Range corollary—a construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite
range of events only.

7. Experience corollary—a person’s construction system varies as he
successively construes the replication of events.

8. Modulation corollary—the variation in a person’s construction system is
limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose range of
convenience the variants lay.

9. Fragmentation corollary—a person may successively employ a variety of
construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each
other.

10. Commonality corollary—to the extent that one person employs a
construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his
processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person.

11. Sociality corollary—to the extent that one person construes the construction
processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the
other person (Bannister & Mair, 1968, pp. 14-23).

In an historical sense, the theory of personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) signified a
major development for constructivist psychology (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon,
1992). It nevertheless differed from other mentalist branches of psychology such as
existentialism and phenomenology, both in terms of their ontology and scientific
practices. Kelly adhered to quantitative, empirical scientific methods and although the
theory was epistemologically associated with the mechanical metaphor (Pepper, 1942)
of traditional psychology, it can be reinterpreted from the perspective of contextualism because of its emphasis upon an individual’s unique, and therefore nomothetically unpredictable, construction of his or her world.

Young and Collin (2004, p. 375) suggested that constructivism was a cognitive, mentalist psychology in origin and proposed that:

It differs from the scientific orthodoxy of logical positivism in its contention that the world cannot be known directly, but rather by the construction imposed on it by the mind. However, it is generally considered to share positivism’s commitment to a dualist epistemology and ontology. Thus, it represents an epistemological perspective, concerned with how we know, and by implication how we develop meaning.

Constructivism is, therefore, a psychology which assumes the person exists very much inside his or her own head and communicates with an outside world constructed by his or her own engagement with that world; hence the reference to dualism. Mahoney’s (2003) reference to the mediation by language and symbol systems, however, brings constructivism to the social dimension of existence; which is aptly associated with social constructionism.

Social constructionism proffers an assumption that knowledge is sustained by social processes (Botella, 1995), if not consensus (Rosen, 1996), and that knowledge and social action go together (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 376). The positivist notion of environment does not equate to context in terms of social constructionist perspective; rather, context is socially constructed (Collin, 1996a, 1997). This assumes an ontology that transcends the inside and outside dichotomy of dualism and founds an epistemology of a psychology of the individual that is intrinsically social in its orientation. In its radical extreme, social constructionism posits that thoughts are not
owned by an individual, but merely transmitted public property that is personally experienced in a given place and time.

Gergen (1985, pp. 4-7), a significant protagonist of the social constructionist paradigm, declared the social constructionist orientation to (social) psychology as consisting of four assumptions:

1. What we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood. What we take to be knowledge of the world is not a product of induction, or of the building and testing of hypotheses.

2. The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people.

3. The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not directly dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric, etc.).

4. Forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage.

Brown (2002a, p. 14; Brown & Brooks, 1996) also summarised the assumptions of social constructionism:

1. All aspects of the universe are interconnected; it is impossible to separate figure from ground, subject from object, people from their environment.

2. There are no absolutes; thus human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred.

3. Human behaviour can only be understood in the context in which it occurs.
4. The subjective frame of reference of human beings is the only legitimate source of knowledge. Events occur outside human beings. As individuals understand their environments and participate in these events, they define themselves and their environment.

These assumptions contrast strongly against those of psychologies founded upon logical-positivism and underpin a new paradigm for the study of career.

Though social constructionism equally lays itself open to question by the position of its founding assumptions it refuses to colonise truth through method (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism takes an approach to psychological knowledge that implies the necessary contextualised, negotiability of truth (Gergen, 2001). Gergen railed against believers of the faithful of traditional science: “In large degree the sciences have been enchanted by the myth that empirical methodology were some variety of meat grinder from which truth could be turned out like so many sausages” (Gergen, 1985, p. 14).

Notwithstanding his criticism of traditional empirical psychology, Gergen (2001) defended that tradition’s right to a voice, amongst many, in the creation and transmission of knowledges and challenged the many critics for their irresponsible assaults and lack of consideration for the repercussions of their critique. Moreover, Gergen assigned a responsibility of legitimisation upon the insurgent postmodernist psychologies by way of setting the task of demonstrating their relevance to the lives of people, theory and methods. In this way Gergen insisted upon each discipline knowing its epistemological foundations, capacity, and limitations; and furthermore, argued that no other system of knowledge should be cast aside or silenced by another for its own benefit and position. Gergen (1987, 2001) situated psychology as a discipline that needed to review its epistemological foundations, but moreover, as a social entity that
had come into focus as a topic of inquiry—a psychology of psychology or metapsychology.

According to Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 142) “reality is a function of the observed and the observer”. Their assertion highlights social constructionism’s contextualist epistemology and that the psychology of career must account for in the interpersonal nexus of the career counselling experience. Constructivisms reject absolute truth (Patton and McMahon) and hold that one cannot observe reality without inherently participating in it (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995). Constructivisms’ abnegation of the search for absolute truth, or the scientific vision of a knowable world, does not necessarily render psychological science into chaotic relativism (Richardson, 1993). A core assumption of constructivisms is that an individual actively and continuously creates or constructs their realities (Warwar & Greenberg, 2000) and that her or she is recursively a product of their social environment and its discursive contingencies (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995); through their action and engagement with discourse and language (Young & Valach, 1996). Constructivisms assume that an individual brings meaning to his or life which is embedded in a context, place and time.

_A Cautionary Note_

There has been considerable debate surrounding the epistemologies and ontology of constructivisms and ambiguity in their terminology; a condition perhaps attributable to their nascent status in psychology (Young & Collin, 2004); and this section will briefly describe some of the debate.

The epistemological assumptions of constructivisms have been brought into question by Erwin (1999) who criticises constructivism’s epistemological and ontological position that language brings things into reality. Erwin uses the example of
the cosmological constellation “The Big Dipper” to gainsay by arguing that the stars and configuration existed long before humans and therefore the person who labelled the constellation did not bring it into reality. My reading of Erwin suggests that he has not accounted for the capacity of psychological reality (i.e., constructed reality) to feel real, and for individuals to respond accordingly, even though it may have no tangible, verifiable status. The marketing concept of brand and advertising demonstrate how a lived discourse can create reality for a person. Is Coca-Cola merely a dark, brown, sweet fizzy drink that comes in a vessel with a red label and trademark white ribbon? The empiricist would answer affirmatively, and rightly so. Or is Coca-Cola more than that? Is it a psychosocial entity that transcends the senses with its paradoxical invocation that “you can’t beat the real thing”? In this way it becomes a diet thing, a sexual thing, an age thing; it becomes many things that bring the individual to pull it from the fridge on hot summer’s day. It becomes these things because of a person’s formulation of it according to the psychosocial milieu in which he or she has been exposed to the drink and its discursive variations. The soft drink in question existed long before I was born; however, its presence was, soon enough, experienced in my life when I was socialised to its shared meanings and from amongst this matrix of meanings I drew my own. Nevertheless, Erwin’s critique is not without merit in that he has called for investigations into how the constructivist and social constructionist epistemology translates into the practice of career counselling so informed.

Steenbarger (1991) argued that constructivisms were a progenitor of contextualism and rejected stage-based, teleology of organicism. According to Lyddon (1995), however, constructivisms are derived from two epistemological worldviews: contextualism and organicism. Lyddon argued that there are two types of constructivisms when conceived from the perspective of worldviews: respectively
Formal and final. Formal constructivism is based upon the contextualist worldview and that theories are “founded on the idea that meanings emerge out of the ongoing flow or patterning of social behaviour and forms of symbolic interaction (e.g., language) exhibited over time and within context” (Lyddon, 1995, p.516). Final constructivism is derived from the organismic worldview because of the assumption of teleological end-cause that humans operate as an open, active system that self-organises over a lifespan. Mahoney and Patterson’s (1992) approach to constructivisms reflects the organismic worldview and the notion of final constructivism, because it appreciates the concept of self-organisation toward a goal of equilibrium. The social constructionist approach to constructivisms reflects the contextualist worldview and the notion of formal constructivism (Lyddon, 1995) The crucial difference lies in the teleological assumption that the person aims toward integration. Notwithstanding the ostensible phenomenon of self-organisation by the individual, it is asserted here that this “drive” is not an intrinsic psychic motive, but rather a social psychological phenomenon that is a function of, or more radically put, an artefact of, contextual influences including those discursive through to economic (Sugarman, 1996). Self-organisation, therefore, is “driven” by context—using the notion of context conceptualised by Collin (1996a, 1997).

Summary

Vocational psychology and career counselling are relative newcomers to constructivist and social constructionist perspectives with respect to theory articulation and practice (Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1999). Savickas (1993) described the postmodern shift in career theory as a move from objectivity to perspectivity, and from seeking truth to participation in conversations: a turn which was exemplary constructivist and social constructionist thinking. Though
there were early signs of a constructivist turn within the field of vocational psychology (e.g., Chartrand, Strong, & Weitzman, 1995; Collin & Young, 1986; Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1989a; Savickas, 1993, 1995b), major reviews of the discipline’s literature in the era of constructivists’ emergence in the 1980s showed little in the way of a burgeoning interest in its application (e.g., Gelso & Fassinger, 1990; Holland, Magoon, & Spokane, 1981; Osipow, 1987). More recently there has been growth in the application of constructivism to theory of career counselling (e.g., Brott, 2001, 2004; Chen, 1997, 1998, 2002; Cochran, 1997; Gibson, 2004; McMahon & Patton, 2006a; Peavy, 2000b, 2001; Savickas, 2005). These will be presented in more detail in a subsequent sub-section.

Despite their differences, constructivism and social constructionism present alternative pathways for psychologies of career. Two crucial aspects need to be reinforced. Firstly, an individual constructs his or her personal reality. Secondly, an individual’s construction of personal reality is an inherently socialised process because of the direct imposition of social influences and the indirect power of discourse socially acquired and mediated. In this view, an individual cannot be understood in isolation from context, a point which is crucial in the Systems Theory Framework; to which I now turn.

Systems Theory Framework

Savickas (1995b, p. 29) called for a “sophisticated framework” that could adequately deal with the diversity of epistemological and theoretical groups within vocational psychology. In their view to the “future of career”, Collin and Young (2000a) emphasised the importance of two crucial issues: the construction of individual identity and the importance of regarding the individual in his or her context, spatial and temporal. Collin and Young were calling for theories of career that would provide a
new framework for post-industrial world and relate to the epistemological root
metaphor of contextualism (Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 1986; Lyddon, 1989, 1995).

A comprehensive framework for the study of career and practices of career
development that strongly relates to constructivisms (McMahon & Patton, 2006c) and
the contextualist worldview is the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton &
McMahon, 1999, 2006a, 1997b). Brown (2002b) noted, in his perspective on the
convergence of career theories, the emergence of the STF as a possible integrative
framework for career theory. Amundson (2005) also acknowledged STF and its role in
the new global context of career. This section describes the STF. It is prefaced by an
analysis of the predominant theories of career and their treatment of context.

Content Analysis of Major Theories

Patton and McMahon (1999) constructed a history and contextual analysis of
major theories of career development by using a content/process heuristic after the work
of Minor (1992). Minor’s (1992) analysis organised theories around the assumptions
that: career development continues over a person’s lifespan; career development
involves choice and adjustment; choice and adjustment involve content and process
variables; and that theories tend to focus upon content or process. The work of Patton
and McMahon provides a comprehensive analysis of major theories for the work of
constructivist scholars and practitioners who seek an holistic view of career and career
development practices that fully account for diversity of individuals and their context,
and that relate to the root metaphor of contextualism (e.g., Collin, 1997; Lyddon, 1989).

Patton and McMahon (1999) advanced Minor’s (1992) overview by analysing
theories with respect to their dealing with a wide range of content and process
influences pertinent to career development across a wide perspective of theoretical
positions. Their analysis was informed by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) conceptualisation
of the levels in which an individual exists (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). The breadth of the influences selected by Patton and McMahon was justified by their aim of developing a pan-theoretical framework that would recognise the breadth of career, recognise the contribution of a variety of theories, and enable practitioners to select the most appropriate theory for a person or influence. The content influences they selected include:

1. Intraperonal systems—influences of ability, aptitudes, interests, gender, age, skills, ethnicity, sexual orientation, beliefs, health, disability, values, world-of-work knowledge, personality, self-concept, and physical attributes.

2. Social systems—influences of family, peers, community groups, education institutions, media, and workplace.

3. Environmental systems—influences of political decision, historical trends, employment market, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and globalisation.

The theories were also viewed in terms of the process influences of recursiveness, change, and chance.

Those theories that focus upon content had a limited focus upon influences at the exosystem and mesosystem levels of the individual (i.e., societal and environmental influences). Those theories that focused upon process likewise had a limited treatment of high level influences. The final group of theories, which focused on content and process, were more inclusive of high level influences of context. Although Patton and McMahon (1999) highlighted the growth of theoretical developments that accounted for context, there was some evidence of a lack of focus upon context of the individual by predominant theories. Furthermore, Young et al. (2002) suggested that some theories (e.g., Vondracek & Kawasaki, 1995; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg,
1986) may well focus on context variables; they indicated however that these theories viewed context from the perspective of logical-positivism and were not derived from a contextualist root metaphor and a social constructionist view of context, as it pertains to career (Collin, 1996a, 1997).

**STF: A Framework for Theory and Practice**

The Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006a) was presented in its earliest forms in 1995 (McMahon & Patton, 1995) and significantly formulated by 1997 (Patton & McMahon, 1997a, 1997b). The STF represents a major achievement toward the development of a comprehensive framework for the study of career and stands as a meta-theoretical framework that facilitates the expression of both traditional logical-positive theories and theories under the aegis of constructivisms (McMahon & Patton, 2006b). The STF serves as a heuristic tool to frame the multiple influences pertinent to an individual’s career and the complex of inter-relationships amongst those influences. It is the second purpose that predominates in this research project, as it relates to the application of the STF to development and investigation of career counselling techniques for individuals.

The STF serves theoretical formulations founded upon logical-positivism *and* constructivisms. As such, the contextual system of STF needs to be viewed accordingly. For the purposes of this research, which is inherently influenced by social constructionism and formal constructivism, the contextualist root metaphor prevails, and therefore Collin’s (1996a, 1997) conceptualisation of context is assumed throughout. Patton and McMahon drew upon a range of theories to develop the STF; and these included developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1989). At this juncture it is worthwhile describing the influences and systems it is important to review the systems theory assumptions that underpin the STF.
Assumptions of Systems Theories

Stevens (2001, p. 184) provided an overview of systems theories as they relate to counselling and conceptualised them as having the following general assumptions:

1. All systems seek homeostasis
2. All systems incorporate feedback loops so as to function.
3. Hierarchy is an integral part of systemic functioning including all the roles, rules, and sub-systems necessary. Boundaries are necessary to facilitate the existence of roles, rules, and sub-systems.
4. The system cannot be understood by reductionism (analysing the individual parts of the system); rather, it must be examined as an entity, synthesising the component parts into a whole.
5. Change in one part of the system creates change in all parts of the system [original italics throughout].

If Steven’s points were to be considered from the perspectives of root metaphors, then the first point – all systems seek homeostasis [my italics] – would lend this formulation of systems to the organics metaphor and consequently final constructivism as proposed by Lyddon (1995).

Patton and McMahon (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) identified key features of systems theory, in general, that influenced their formulation of the STF, and these included:

1. Wholes and parts: The notion of wholes and parts serves to emphasise that each element of a system or sub-system is interdependent upon other elements and that these elements should not be considered in isolation, lest crucial information be lost. Hence a systems approach is holistic.
2. Patterns and rules: Relationships exist within and between elements of a system and these emerge as patterns within the system. Rules are special types of patterns formed by human systems and vary across different systems.

3. Acausality: The discovery of linear relationships of cause-and-effect between elements is eschewed as there is an assumption of multiplicity of relationships between elements, and thus an inherent difficulty in reducing and isolating simplistic causal relationships.

4. Recursiveness: The concept of recursiveness assumes non-linear, multidirectional feedback amongst elements of a system. This implies a dynamic, fluctuating process within the system as each element communicates with others.

5. Discontinuous change: A system is always in a condition of flux, but balanced by internal homeostatic processes. The term discontinuous emphasises the unpredictability or suddenness of internal or external changes.

6. Open and closed systems. A closed system has no relationship to the environment in which it is positioned, whereas an open system communicates with its environment. Its openness to its context is necessary for its regeneration.

7. Abduction. Deductive and inductive reasoning are linear. Abductive reasoning is concerned with the emergence of patterns and relationships, and lateral thinking.

8. Story. Highly specific accounts of a particular system require the connection of elements and description of relationships and patterns. This descriptive
process is a story about the special, localised conditions of the system under inspection (pp. 181-187).

Unlike Steven’s (2001) principles of systems theory, the aforementioned used by Patton and McMahon do not mandate inclusion of a notion of homeostasis and would therefore more readily pertain to the contextualist worldview and the notion of formal constructivism proposed by Lyddon (1995).

The STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006a) describes influences in terms of content and process and positions those influences at (and across) the levels of the individual system and the contextual system, which is conceptualised as the social system and the environmental-societal system.

Content Influences

The Individual System. The individual is conceived of as an active, participative, unique being and is at the centre of the STF. The individual is not defined in terms of reduced and isolated elements (e.g., abilities, traits), but as a whole, and as a confluence of unique features. The individual system comprises the following influences: gender, values, health, sexual orientation, disability, ability, interests, beliefs, skills, personality, world-of-work knowledge, age, self-concept, physical attributes, ethnicity, and, aptitudes. This list of influences is not exhaustive and has been graphically presented in Figure 1.

The Social System. The context system is firstly formulated in terms of the proximal social system through which the individual interacts with other people systems. The social system comprises the following influences: family, peers, community groups, education institutions, media, and, workplace. The social system has been graphically presented in Figure 2.
The Environmental-Societal System. The environmental-societal system of influences, shown in Figure 3, consists of the following: political decisions, historical trends, employment market, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and globalisation. Though these influences are distal to the individual, they are crucial to the social construction of context.

Figure 1. The individual system.
Figure 2. *The social system.*
Figure 3. The environmental-societal system.
Process Influences

Recursiveness. Patton and McMahon (Patton & McMahon, 1999) rejected the notion of reciprocal interaction which they used in earlier formulations of the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1997a) because it implied equivalence in size and direction of relationships between influences and notions of linear causation. The STF adopts the notion recursiveness because it implies multiplicity of influences, and dynamics of nonlinearity, acausality, mutuality, and multidirectionality across past, present and future. Influences’ potencies change over time and in interaction with other influences in the whole system and subsystem. Influences communicate with those positioned in other levels of an individual’s system. The openness of the influences to the effects of one another was described by Patton and McMahon as permeability, and was graphically represented as broken lines in the Figure 4.

Change Over Time. Change, or more accurately, discontinuous change, is as inherent to the STF as it is to any person’s career. The circular depiction of the system in Figure 5 represents the nonlinearity of a person’s career and experience of time. Furthermore, the notion of nonlinearity supports the social constructionist challenge to stage-based career milestones, which can be perceived as socially created and mediated expectations (Sugarman, 1996). Over time each influence will change intrinsically and interactively.

Chance. The use of chance captures the unpredictability of influences within the systems and events within a person’s life, and has been formulated as a source for naturally occurring chaos within a person’s career and life (e.g., Bloch, 2005; Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005; Gibb, 1998). Chance, or unpredictability, now seems to be inherent in the post-industrial world-of-work and need to be accounted for by theories of career. Chance is depicted as random flashes in the Figure 5.
Figure 4. Recursiveness.
Summary

Consistent with the spirit of theoretical convergence (Hansen, 2002; Savickas, 1994a) and transtheoretical integration, STF serves as a metatheory of career theories and career development practices from a range of theoretical traditions and disciplines. As such, the STF does not ostensibly privilege one theory of career over another.
Whilst this is a laudable aim, there are ontological and epistemological questions that remain unanswered within the current formulation of STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). For example, how can STF account for the tension between one school of thought which assumes realist ontology and another which assumes constructivist ontology? They are mutually exclusive. Alternatively, how can the STF account for the fundamental differences in the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the theories that fall within the conceptual groupings of mechanicism, formism, organicism and contextualism? Patton and McMahon argue in favour of a contextualist epistemology for STF, yet allow for the accession of theories founded upon formist grounds (e.g., trait-and-factor). These questions require answers if the STF is to be advanced as a bridging, or indeed unifying, framework for theory.

McMahon and Patton (2006b) emphasise STF being a manifestation of postmodern thought and constructivism. Therefore it would be useful to assess the STF against the themes of a postmodern epistemology (Polkinghorne, 1992). Perhaps the solution to the ontological and epistemological incompatibility amongst the theories it subsumes, is not within the STF itself, but rather within the theorist, researcher or practitioner using the STF; for it is the user of the theoretical framework who brings it to bear upon his or her local situation and conceptual problems in order make sense for him or her. This approach would readily satisfy Polkinghorne’s epistemological criterion of neopragmatism.

Such a solution is good and well for the theorist with a proclivity for postmodern thought, but offers little inspiration for the theorist who holds a realist worldview and pursues the attendant science of logical positivism. The challenge for adherents of STF, and its capacity for theoretical integration, is to demonstrate the value it brings to theory, research and practice across diverse and disparate domains. This paper has
partly contributed to addressing that challenge by demonstrating STF’s capacity to subsume a theory of personality which, although constructivist in orientation, has a significant dimension of empiricism in its rhetoric and methods.

The primary orientation of this research project is constructivism. The STF also serves as a vehicle to operationalise constructivist and social constructionist theories of career (McMahon & Patton, 2006b, 2006c; Patton & McMahon, 2006c). It serves constructivism because of its emphasis upon the individual. It equally serves social constructionism because it locates the individual within myriad social influences. Its assumptions of process influences, particularly *recursiveness*, and the role of *story*, allude to the centrality of the individual actively construing the meaning of his or her life awash in myriad proximal and distal content influences. What is required, however, is further articulation of the STF with respect to its capacity to work as a theoretical framework that is useful for the explication of an individual’s career and identity. This thesis will argue that integration of narrative, or more specifically, theory of dialogical self, will approach the achievement of that goal.

**Theory of Career Construction**

The Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002, 2005), and its earlier formulation (Savickas, 2001b), comprehensively covers process and content aspects of career (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) and is lauded as being nearest to a single integrated theoretical framework for career (Inkson, 2007). The Theory Career Construction serves as a broad meta-theory for the understanding of the individual and his or her career from the perspective of constructivisms. The current exposition of Savickas’s theory is followed by a range of theoretical positions that broadly explicate a narrative approach to career, culminating in the presentation of the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans &
Kempen, 1993). This collection of theories will serve as the second framework for the
career counselling technique under development and investigation.

Savickas (2001b) proposed an integrative framework for the study of career; and
one that was particularly useful for the conceptualisation of the individual and his or her
career. Savickas’s (2002, 2005) more recent formulation of his Theory of Career
Construction (or Career Construction Theory) asserts that:

Individually construct their careers by imposing meaning on their vocational
behaviour and occupational experiences. ….. the subjective definition [of career]
is not the sum of work experience but rather the patterning of these experiences
into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story. [Career] denotes a
subjective construction that imposes personal meaning on past memories,
present experiences, and future aspirations by weaving them into a life theme
that patterns the individual’s work life. Thus, the subjective career that guides,
regulates, and sustains vocational behaviour emerges from an active process of
making meaning, not discovering pre-existing facts. It consists of biographical
reflexivity that is discursively produced and made “real” through vocational
behaviour (Savickas, 2005, p. 43).

Through this brief definitional description of career, Savickas clearly indicates
the constructivist foundations of his theory in its emphasis upon discourse and meaning
making. Savickas (2002) distinguished between the objective and subjective career.
For career construction theory, the term career signifies subjective reflection upon an
individual’s vocational behaviour, not the behaviour per se. The reflective process can
focus upon the doing of actual events, such as occupations, tasks, duties: the “objective
career”. Alternatively, the reflective process can focus upon the meaning ascribed to
events: the “subjective career”.

Savickas (2001b) built upon the three-tiered model of personality proposed by McAdams (1995). McAdams (1995, 1996) proposed that the personality could be conceptualised at three levels which allow for the determination of differences amongst individuals:

1. Dispositional signatures: personality traits.
2. Contextualisation of lives: personal concerns.
3. The problem of identity: personal narratives.

These three levels can be seen as partial manifestations of Runyan’s (1983) claim for three goals of personality psychology (i.e., what is true to all human beings, groups of human beings, and of individual human beings).

Though Savickas (2001b) aimed to renovate the life-span/life-space developmental theory, his proposed framework was intended to support other theories in accordance with the spirit of theoretical convergence and integration. Across the different levels, the framework can accommodate theorists from different worldviews (i.e., mechanical, formist, organicist, and contextualist). Furthermore, Savickas advanced McAdams’s framework by adding a fourth level relating to development. A précis of the original framework, directly derived from McAdams’s work, will be presented first so as to adumbrate the latter work which was structured as three components: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes.

Levels of Personality and Career

**Level I – Vocational Personality Types.** This first level was based upon dispositional traits described by McAdams (1995, 1996). At the first level of analysis, personality can be conceived in terms of traditional psychological science. This includes broad, decontextualised dispositional descriptors of individual difference – traits (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and
agreeableness). Although supportive of the construct of traits, McAdams (1995, 1996) stated that they were unable to differentiate individuals from one another because they lacked the unique specificity of a unique person. He used the expression “psychology of the stranger” to illustrate the argument that individuals may well be described as extrovert or introvert, but such a description says little about the unique expression and experience of these traits and hence it does not identify anyone at all. An extension of this first level includes the trait-and-factor theories: for example, the classical RIASEC person-work environment typology (Holland, 1985).

**Level II – Career Concerns.** The second level of personality analysis pertains to a host of constructs (e.g., motives, defence mechanisms, coping styles, life tasks, and values) was based upon McAdams’s (1995, 1996) notion of personal concerns. Personal concerns pertain to what an individual wants and does in a particular phase of his or her life. These constructs are contextualised in time, place, and social roles; hence offer an enhanced capacity for differentiation of individuals, as distinct from traits. Combined together the two levels offer a considerable framework for viewing an individual, however, cannot precisely describe a unique human being. Savickas (2001b) suggested that career concerns mostly pertained to the lifespan/lifespace issues pursued by development theorists and those that normatively relate to an individual at relative stages of career development.

**Level III – Career Narratives.** The last level of the framework provides the truly unique and fine-detail of an individual, representing McAdams’s (1995, 1996) conception of personal narratives. This is the level of the personal story of an individual; the definitively unique history, present, and future of one person that can be constructed by that one person; the subjectively lived experience. Level III is the primary concern of this research project. Savickas described this level of analysis as the
“why” of vocational behaviour. It is at this level that an individual tells the story of who he or she was, is, and envisions becoming.

Level IV – Mechanisms of Development. Savickas (2001b) proposed this additional level to account for action in the process of career development, suggesting that the progenitor framework (McAdams, 1995) did not fully reflect processes and instead focused upon content (e.g., learning, cognition, decision-making). In a later revision of his framework, Savickas (2005) subsumed mechanisms of development into a broader conceptualisation of career adaptability at Level II.

Savickas (2005) later presented the Theory of Career Construction as a framework consisting of three broad components akin to the original framework consisting of four levels (Savickas, 2001b) upon which it was founded. These broad components include vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes. In an earlier formulation of the career construction theory, Savickas (2002) clearly indicated that the theory was of the developmental school after Super’s (1957) seminal theory and later modifications.

There are 16 propositions underpinning the Theory of Career Construction. Savickas (2002) subdivided the propositions according to the categories of developmental contextualism, vocational self-concepts, and the developmental tasks as the core of individual career construction. Savickas’s propositions are enumerated in the following text:

1. A society and its institutions structure an individual’s life course through social roles. The life structure of an individual, shaped by social processes such as gendering, consists of core and peripheral roles. Balance among core roles such as work and family promotes stability whereas imbalances produce strain.
2. Occupations provide a core role and a focus for personality organisation for most men and women, although for some individuals this focus is peripheral, incidental, or even non-existent. Then other life roles such as student, parent, homemaker, leisurite, and citizen may be at the core. Personal preferences for life roles are deeply grounded in the social practices that engage individuals and locate them in unequal social positions.

3. An individual’s career pattern—that is, the occupational level attained and the sequence, frequency, and duration of jobs—is determined by the parents’ socioeconomic level and the person’s education, abilities, personality traits, self-concepts, and career adaptability in transaction with the opportunities presented by society.

4. People differ in vocational characteristics such as ability, personality traits, and self-concepts.

5. Each occupation requires a different pattern of vocational characteristics, with tolerances wide enough to allow some variety of individuals in each occupation.

6. People are qualified for a variety of occupations because of their vocational characteristics and occupational requirements.

7. Occupational success depends on the extent to which individuals find in their work roles adequate outlets for their prominent vocational characteristics.

8. The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement their vocational self-concepts. Job satisfaction depends on establishment in a type of occupation, a work situation, and a way of life in which one can play the type of roles that
growth and exploratory experiences have led one to consider congenial and appropriate.

9. The process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. Self-concepts develop through the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical make-up, opportunities to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the approval of peers and supervisors. Implementation of vocational self-concepts in work roles involves a synthesis and compromise between individual and social factors. It evolves from role playing and learning from feedback, whether the role is played in fantasy, in the counselling interview, or in real-life activities such as hobbies, classes, clubs, part-time work, and entry jobs.

10. Although vocational self-concepts become increasingly stable from late adolescence forward, providing some continuity in choice and adjustment, self-concepts and vocational preferences do change with time and experience as the situations in which people live and work change.

11. The process of vocational change may be characterised by a maxi-cycle of career stages characterised as progressing through periods of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. The five stages are subdivided into periods marked by vocational development tasks which individuals experience as social expectations.

12. A mini-cycle of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement occurs during transitions from one career stage to the next as well as each time an individual's career is destabilised by socioeconomic and
personal events such as illness and injury, plant closings and company layoffs, and job redesign and automation.

13. Vocational maturity is a psychological construct that denotes an individual's degree of vocational development along the continuum of career stages from growth through disengagement. From a societal perspective, an individual's vocational maturity can be operationally defined by comparing the developmental tasks being encountered to those expected based on chronological age.

14. Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development. The adaptive fitness of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies—the ABCs of career construction—increases along the developmental lines of concern, control, conception, and confidence.

15. Career construction is prompted by vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas and then produced by responses to these life changes.

16. Career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations that explain vocational development tasks and occupational transitions, exercises that strengthen adaptive fitness, and activities that clarify and validate vocational self-concepts.

Savickas (2005) suggested that the three components of the theory of career construction pertained to the what, how, and why of career; that is, vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes, respectively. Although life themes are
the primary focus of this research project, an overview of Savickas’s metatheory will be presented in the following paragraphs.

**Vocational Personality**

The career construction theory does not reject trait-and-factor notions; rather it aims to augment them with the subjective experience of the individual. Savickas (2005) stated that the theory focused upon the “implementation of vocational self-concepts, thus providing a subjective, private, and *idiographic* perspective for comprehending careers to augment the objective, public, and *nomothetic* perspective for understanding occupations” (p.44) [my italics]. Here the Level I concept used by Savickas (2001b), and adopted from McAdams (1995, 1996), is evident. However, Savickas employs constructivist methodology through emphasis upon subjective implementation of self-concepts as distinct from the understanding of oneself from the perspective of shared, public forms (i.e., traits). To be ascribed a code according to the RIASEC model (Holland, 1985) may provide an interesting perspective for objectively comparing and contrasting myself against others, a source of information for considering clusters of occupations, and determining my *resemblance* to a prototype and *reputation* amongst people (Savickas, 2005), however, it would say little about how I would actively engage in the process of meaningfully expressing my “type”.

**Career Adaptability**

Savickas (2005) defined career adaptability as “a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas” (p. 49). Alternatively put, career adaptability subsumes the attitudes, competencies, and behaviours used by individuals to “fit” into work that suits them; and can include repeated or sequences of decisions and behavioural approximations or testing of
particular occupational settings or duties. Moreover, this process is toward the implementation of self-concept. Savickas emphasised the career construction theory does not focus on the P or the E with respect to the P-E fit abbreviation; rather it focuses on the dash (-). This position indicates the theory’s assumptions that the construction of a career is a psychosocial process through which self and society are synthesised. In this way occupational role should validate an individual’s sense of self and facilitate social integration against a context of social expectations.

Savickas (1997a) abjured the traditional developmental construct of career maturity, and replaced it with career adaptability; which emphasised a shift away from the organismic/teleological predictability of maturity. It is within the component of career adaptability that Savickas (2005) positioned developmental tasks and stages; a summary treatment will suffice here. He elaborated upon these developmental aspects in considerable detail in Savickas (2002): for example, career stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance or management, and disengagement. Savickas argued that developmental tasks served as indicators of social relativity through which individuals could construct their sense of self and career. At a higher conceptual level, Savickas posited developmental tasks in a theme of grand narrative about socially expected life development, which can be interpreted as a superordinate discourse of expectations in which individuals participate effectively, or otherwise.

The component of career adaptability comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions’ resources represent resources and strategies available to an individual for their management of critical moments, periods, or events (e.g., transitions) present throughout life. Savickas (2005) incorporated specific attitudes, beliefs and competencies within each dimension and indicated that these would influence an individual’s coping behaviours used to deal with tasks,
transitions, and trauma. Moreover, these attitudes, beliefs, and competencies were to synthesise vocational self-concepts with occupational roles. Individuals may develop each dimension at different rates and phases of their life. Savickas purported that an “adaptive individual” could be conceptualised as one who is:

1. Becoming concerned about their future as a worker.
2. Increasing personal control over their vocational future.
3. Displaying curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios.
4. Strengthening the confidence to pursue their aspirations (p. 52) [original italics].

Disequilibrium amongst the four dimensions produces variations in patterns of development, and extreme disharmony may indicate developmental problems.

**Career Concern.** Savickas identified career concern as the most important dimension of adaptability. He conceptualised career concern as a time-bound psychological process in which an individual reflects upon his or her self with respect to their past, present and future. Attenuated concern was conceptualised as indifference, comprising apathy, pessimism and planlessness. “Career concern makes the future feel real ….. Thinking about his or her work life across time is the essence of career because a subjective career is not a behaviour; it is an idea—a reflection on the self” (Savickas, 2005. p. 54) [my italics]. In stating that career concern is a process that makes the future feel real, Savickas cogently indicates an important feature of constructivism. The notion of feeling the reality of the future draws in corporeality and displaces dualist thinking of inside-outside and now-then, by fusing mind, body, past, present and future as one entity. Savickas’s position juxtaposes that of Kidd (1998b, 2004) who argues that emotion has long been neglected in career development theory.
**Career Control.** As with career concern, career control comprises cognitive and affective features. Savickas (2005) described it as being a belief and a feeling that one is responsible for constructing one’s own career. This is an important construct in light of the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Hughes & Thomas, 2005; Leong & Brown, 1995; Leong & Hartung, 2000; Leong & Serafica, 2001), socio-economic status (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Rojewski, 2005), and gender (Betz, 2005; Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001) because it is ostensibly situating responsibility and choice for career construction and therefore social functioning with the individual. Savickas nevertheless argued options may be narrower in some contexts and that responsibility would take different forms across various contexts, cultures and ideologies; and it is presumed here that this argument would also include socio-economic circumstances. Lack of career control was conceived as career indecision. This obverse state needs to be carefully considered in terms of context, lest the individual be blamed for their lack of control, motivation, or determination; or any other superlative associated with “success”.

**Career Curiosity.** This dimension refers to inquisitiveness about occupational information and, moreover, learning how one goes about integrating into the world-of-work. This may entail researching career-related information, actually testing occupational situations or tasks (e.g., work experience), or vicariously testing them (e.g., informational interviewing). Moreover, curiosity supports the reflective process of career concern. Savickas (2005) suggested that the lack of curiosity can produce naiveté about work and inaccurate images of oneself. As with career control, this dimension likewise needs to be considered with some caution in order to ensure that an individual is not decontextualised and blamed.
Career Confidence. The final dimension of career confidence relates to “feelings of self-efficacy concerning the individual’s ability to successfully execute a course of action needed to make and implement suitable educational and vocational choices” (Savickas, 2005, p. 56). Career confidence is underpinned by the development of efficacy in broader life experiences and challenges. Diminished confidence can engender restricted choices due to the construction of internalised barriers or the presence of external barriers; and as a consequence can constrain an individual’s achievement of goals and actualisation of roles.

Life Themes

In his early work, Super (1954, 1957) introduced the idea that life themes were important in the overall development of an individual’s understanding of his or her career. He also introduced thematic extrapolation method as a qualitative assessment process for life themes. At that time, however, Super pursued traditional psychometric, actuarial assessment methods; and thematic extrapolation has since been only rarely referred to in the literature (Jepsen, 1994), and was considered as work yet to be done by Super (Bingham, 2001). Savickas’s theoretical work was affected by Super; and the technique of thematic extrapolation (Collin, 2001) and his own theory of career construction (Savickas, 2005) advanced the idea of life themes at the level of personal narrative and subjective career. He adumbrated the emergence of narrative, life theme, and career theme in his earlier works (Savickas, 1992, 1993) in which he portended, and encouraged, a rise in engaging the notion of perspectivity and facilitating clients’ development of their own stories and subjective career.

Savickas positioned life stories as the crucial threads of continuity that made meaningful the elements of vocational personality and adaptability. Moreover, life stories reify the true individual as opposed to the stranger (McAdams, 1995, 1996)
known only as a conceived composite of traits and other objective features. As distinct from the personality traits, stories express the uniqueness of an individual—a story of one who is contextualised in time, place and role.

Savickas (2005, p.59) adopted the definition of life theme from Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979): “A life theme consists of a problem or a set of problems which a person wishes to solve above everything else and the means the person finds to achieve a solution” (p. 48). Savickas specified that he conceptualised problems as preoccupations, either positive or negative, and that career construction is about the transformation of a personal problem. Career stories explain why an individual made choices and explicate the meanings that guided those choices. Career stories “tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). Savickas noted that stories do not determine the future. However, he asserted that stories play a role in the action of an individual’s career adaptation by evaluating resources, limitations and using traits and abilities to work through tasks, transitions, and trauma.

It is axiomatic that there are commonalities in stories and themes, and these may take various prototypical forms in society (e.g., myths, archetypes, and imagos). Savickas (2005) recognised this, however eschewed the idea that these stories can be objectified and catalogued, because to do so would risk the unique stories of each and every individual. Savickas pursued the agenda of uniqueness by contrasting personality types and life themes. He suggested that a personality type indicates an individual’s resemblance and similarity and a prototypical other, whereas a story was a truly unique description of one person. Types indicate what a person possesses (e.g., abilities, interests) whereas themes indicate why these are important or matter to that person.
Summary

The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999) readily falls under the aegis of contextualism and formal constructivism (Lyddon, 1995). Despite his emphasis upon developmental tasks, Savickas (2005) nevertheless clearly stamped his theory of career construction with the hallmark of constructivisms in the leading sentence: “The theory of career construction explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour” (p. 42). However there is a mixture of worldviews in the theory of career construction. Given its emphasis upon development, particularly the 2002 formulation, it could be associated with the organicist root metaphor; and thus from the purview of constructivisms, it would likely serve the ideas of final constructivism (Lyddon, 1995). In contradiction, however, Savickas states “careers do not unfold; they are constructed as individuals make choices that express their self-concepts and substantiate their goals in the social reality of work roles” (p. 43). This statement abnegates assumptions of a teleological position and thus aligns the theory with formal constructivism. This research project views the theory of career construction from the purview of the contextualist worldview, and thus, ascribes it as a theory of formal constructivism. A significant number of the assumptions of the Career Construction Theory emphasise social context, indicating the theory’s emphasis upon context, and thus its amenability to social constructionist thinking.

The Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002, 2005), and its earlier formulation (Savickas, 2001b), comprehensively covers process and content aspects of career (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) and is lauded as being nearest to a single integrated theoretical framework for career (Inkson, 2007). Within the Theory of Career Construction, the term career signifies reflection upon an individual’s vocational
activity; that is, reflection on the *objective career*, such as occupations, tasks, and duties. The reflective process can also focus upon the meaning ascribed to career events; that is, the *subjective career*. Savickas (2005) posited three components of the theory: *vocational personality*, *career adaptability*, and *life themes*.

In combination, the three components provide a comprehensive theory of career which has considerable potential to subsume a range of theories emanating from different paradigms. Moreover, it has significant potential as a guide for career counselling. Whilst the theory of career construction provides a comprehensive framework, Savickas’s (2002, 2005) formulations of the three components were not equally well articulated with respect to theory. The first two components of vocational personality and career adaptability were exceedingly well described and presented. Given its broad theoretical capacity and relevance to counselling practice, the Theory of Career Construction is addressed in this thesis. The notion of life themes is focused upon specifically; with the aim of further developing its theoretical composition.

Savickas (2001b, 2002, 2005) advanced the idea of life themes at the level of personal narrative and subjective career, and positioned life stories as the crucial threads of continuity that made meaningful the elements of vocational personality and career adaptability. Career-related stories express the uniqueness of an individual, explain why an individual made choices, and explicate the meanings that guided those choices. Career stories “tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (Savickas, 2005, p. 58).

The Theory of Career Construction purports that individuals generate their own life themes of career. It does not in its current formulation offer a psychological explanation for how individuals enact a process of self-constructive storying. Savickas (2001b) posited *selection, optimisation, and compensation* as psychological
mechanisms of career adaptability; however, these mechanisms do not explain how an individual creates a story. Although the theory’s propositions include the statement that “career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations” (Savickas, 2005, p. 46), explication of this theoretical tenet is required to further advance the capacity of the life themes component of the theory. This objective could be achieved by positing a psychological construct to explain how conversations can generate meaningful themes through dialogue with others and with oneself.

In subsequent sections, this thesis will propose that the theory of dialogical self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) can contribute to the achievement of the objective of theoretically explaining how individuals make meaningful sense of career. Accordingly, dialogical self is presented as a psychological construct which acts as the author and narrator of life themes. Such a theoretical solution improves the explanatory capacity of the Theory of Career Construction.

Theory of Dialogical Self

The Theory of Dialogical Self has its roots in contextualist and constructionist psychology and in the works of philosophers Giambattista Vico and Hans Vaihinger, writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, and psychologists William James and George Kelly (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). The Theory of Dialogical Self has been extensively articulated by Hubert Hermans (e.g., 1996, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2006a) along with others (e.g., Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993), particularly in the counselling and psychotherapy literature (e.g., Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). The construct has also been covered in special issues of scholarly journals: take for example the Journal of Constructivist Psychology (2003, issue 2), Theory and Psychology (2002,
issue 2), and *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* (2006, issue 1). Notwithstanding the unpublished doctoral dissertation by Van de Loo (1992, as cited in Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995), the theory has not been articulated into the career development literature. This section presents only the core assumptions of the Theory of Dialogical Self and its features are elaborated if pertinent to particular Studies of this research project.

*The Internet: A Metaphor*

Prior to entering into a description of the theory of dialogical self, especially given the abstract complexities of its tenets, it is useful to consider a metaphor to organise this current formulation of dialogical self.

Consider the internet. In everyday conversation we speak of the content on the internet as being “out-there in the ether somewhere”. One cannot actually touch the content in cyberspace, but we can see it, hear it, and manipulate it by using our computers and mobile phones. The physical computers, chips, wires, and satellites are not the internet: they merely act as a vehicle for it. The internet is a useful analogy of dialogical self. Whilst the brain and the body act as a vehicle for the self, it is only made psychologically real through connections with the psychological and social world. As with the social constructionist approach to the psychology of self (Gergen, 2001), the theory of dialogical self does not hold that self is an entity “inside” the mind. Dialogical self exists in—is created by—the interpersonal dialogue between persons. Self is thus constructed in dialogue with others. Whilst mind and memory maintain the figure of one’s self, it operates in the interpersonal plane of existence, just as the hardwired technology maintains that complex called the internet: it exists in the web of interconnections, not in the hardware per se.
Self-and-Body-and-Space

The notion of embodied (dialogical) self is based on the assumption that space, more earthly in connotation than cosmological, is not only outside, but inside the self (Hermans, 2001a). Dialogical self contrasts against the ahistorical, decontextualised, and disembodied Cartesian self. The platform of Descartes’ notion of self, and its concomitant ontology, is his differentiation between the mind (res cogitans) and the world beyond it (res extensa) (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). There are two core features of the Cartesian self: (a) its separation from the body, and (b) its separation from the world outside of the body. This is ostensive common sense; so much so, that the Cartesian self is both tacitly and explicitly omnipresent within lay conceptions of self and psychological theory (Hermans, 2003). Moreover, Hermans notes that the Cartesian self has direct access to itself and does not need to interact with, or moreover, communicate with, another person on the outside in order to confirm its own existence. This position directly contrasts with the dialogical self, which cannot exist without a body which gives it voice in the social outside. The dialogical self constructs itself both within and outside, simultaneously.

Imagination is core to the construction of a embodied dialogical self; so much so that the imagined body (or a Me) is in the self, and imagined structures of the world (i.e., the world “out there”) are in the self (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). The notions of image schema and metaphor (Johnson, 1987) were viewed as key processes in coalescing body and mind (Hermans, 2003). Image schema—specifically verticality schema—provides a sense of physical, spatial orientation in the world (e.g., up, down, high, low). The mind imagines the body as being in a spatial location and in this imagined way, the body is in the mind (Johnson, 1987). Hermans also suggested that image schema is useful in understanding quantitative abstractions necessary for
grasping the world (e.g., more is up, share prices go up and down). The imaginative construction of metaphor involves the comparison of one entity with another and the transfer of the meaning of one to another. Metaphors are not simple literary devices; they are psychological constructions or representations of the world and serve as vehicles to meaning for the self (Hermans, 2003).

I Authors and Me Actors

A single line from the classic song Do Re Me from the Sound of Music—“Me, a name, I call myself”—captures the essence of the problematic of a narrative approach to personal identity. In this line of the song the pronouns “me” and “I” are established as forms of identity of a person—the same, but different. Secondly, it indicates the personal action of the “I” naming “me”, and concomitantly conferring a difference of the two through one doing something to the other. The naming action is a subtle, crucial element to this process, for it is the action of applying language to an entity; and therein lays the nexus of language, identity and being a person.

The difference between I and Me was distinguished by William James (1890/1952) in his Principles of Psychology. In James’s theory of self, he described the Me, as the empirical self, or known-self, and that it was subdivided into material, social, and spiritual selves. The subdivision of Me underpinned the assertion that an individual could take many variations of Me in the world. The I is an continuous mental process which observes and coheres the many Mes (or perhaps mini-Mes).

This me is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known. The I which knows them cannot itself be an aggregate; …… It is a Thought, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriative of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own [original italics] (James, 1890/1952, p. 259).
Law, Meijers and Wijers (2002, p. 431) adeptly noted this as “The ‘I’ is subjective, active and knowing part of the self; while the ‘me’ is the objective, passive and known part”.

James’s notion of self is fundamental to the theory of dialogical self; moreover, it was the reformulation of I and Me in narrative terms by referring to I as the author and Me as the actor (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). Furthermore, Hermans et al went beyond James’s idea of a single author, I, and invented the notion of an I that had the potential for multiplicity through dialogical relations with others.

Multiple Voices and Positions

The theory of dialogical self assumes that I can have multiple voices (Hermans, 1996, 2001a; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). Adapting Bakhtin’s (1973/1929) literary analysis of Dostoevsky, Hermans and his colleagues borrowed the notion of a polyphonic novel to explain that an individual can take on various voices embodied as one. Although written by one person in actuality, the polyphonic novel is spoken by many authors of the story—the characters. Each character becomes an author of his or her own story spoken by his or her own voice; each character is independent and speaks its mind.

A character’s word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author’s word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, not does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7).
Dostoevsky’s characters were inter-related and to be conceived of in a spatial relationship; a cross-section at one instance in time; not uncoupled, but rather intrinsically juxtaposed or contradictory, yet not independent of one another (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). This spatialisation of voices is a crucial correlate to the dialogical self and relates to the embodied and spatial self. From the analogy of dialogical self being akin to a polyphonic novel, it extends that an individual, like a polyphonic novel, is made up of many characters, each independent of one another; yet ineluctably together, invented by one multifarious self, in one body, under the same hand, who brought them, each and everyone, into voice, and thence into reality. How, then, does the dialogical self become so multifarious? The genius of Hermans’ theory is within the notion of the self taking different positions in space and time.

In addition to the characteristic of multiple voices, the I can take multiple positions in space and time and can observe its constructed Me moving in an imagined or real landscape. Dialogical self is thus decentred; that is, there is not one central, autonomous self (Hermans, 2003). Dialogical self was then defined in terms of:

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 the individual consists of I taking multiple perspectives in different temporal and spatial positions, giving voice to themselves and to one another. Again borrowing from Bakhtin, Hermans (2001b) had referred to the literary term *chronotope*, which indicated the inherent bonding of character in time and space, and extended it to the temporal and spatial specificity of dialogical exchanges and meanings.

Hermans (2002b, p. 71) defined the characteristics of *I-positions*, which are the many spatial and temporal positions that may be taken up by the I. They may take on features of permanence (e.g., a relationship with a lifelong friend) or be transient (e.g., a stranger on a bus with whom one strikes up a conversation). Positions may attract institutionalised support (e.g., valorised social roles such as spouse or a parent), or they may attract social derision (e.g., deviant groups). I-positions may vary in their effect upon one another; that is, there is no assumption of equivalent reciprocity amongst them. I-positions may be imaginary (e.g., a childhood superhero character). The frequency with which I-positions are active within the self may vary. I-positions may be positive or negative, enjoyable or threatening. The degree of otherness may vary such that two positions may differ only slightly whereas others may be at odds with one another (e.g., being a worksite manager whilst being surreptitiously supportive of a union strike). Furthermore, some I-positions are not within the immediate awareness of the individual (Hermans, 2003).

I-positions are unlike traits, which are assumed to be stable across situations and time, do not allow for self-reflection and self-evaluation, are inherently orthogonal, and are unable to dynamically conflict and reconcile with one another (Hermans, 2001b). However, individuals may construct an I-position of a trait and author from that position. Hermans suggested that, in doing so, traits are “transformed from characterisations to characters” (p. 332).
The self becomes *dialogical* with the exchange, or communication, with the individual’s phenomenal world (cf. Buber, 1958/1923). Thus the dialogical self does not involve a hierarchical structure of personality but rather a dynamic flux of interacting voices.

The *I* has the possibility to move, as in a space, from one position the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions. The *I* has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. ….. As different voices these characters exchange information about their respective *Mes* and their worlds, resulting a complex, narratively structured self (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992, pp.28-29).

The voices and dialogue may be real, as with conversations with other individuals, or imagined dialogue generated by different I-positions.

Notwithstanding the multivocal character of dialogical self and the capacity to take multiple positions, it is necessary to concede that there would ordinarily be one dominant voice and position (Barresi, 2002). Although the notion of dialogical self does not necessarily imply a cacophony of competing voices—as with the phenomenal experience of *schizophrenia* (Lysaker & Lysaker, 2002, 2004)—Hermans (2003) suggested that that on the other extreme of the continuum, a monologue, or the taking of predominant position, seriously inhibited the potential of the dialogical system, and that unheard or unspoken voices and positions should be facilitated into a space in which they received an audience.

*Change of the Dialogical Self*

It is axiomatic that every person changes; however change is not necessarily a function of life-stages, or time per se, as traditional developmental theories may
ostensibly hold (e.g., Super, 1957). The theory of dialogical self presents a process on how personal change occurs. The dialogical self is not static and is inherently transformed by the exchanges amongst I-positions or with other individuals—real or imagined (Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). The dialogical self has the capacity to be innovative, that is, to change through positioning and re-positioning (Hermans, 2002b; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Notwithstanding the capacity of the dialogical self to innovate, it may also experience its own form of personal conservatism through which multiple voices and positions are eschewed (Hermans, 2003). Fundamental processes related to this conservatism are validation and invalidation (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). Validation holds that once a person has constructed or told a coherent story of his or her life, then he or she goes about consolidating it through seeking experience and engaging in dialogical interchange that is consistent with it. Invalidation is the opposite process and individuals tend not to engage in this process readily.

There are two generic characteristics which make the dialogical self amenable to change and innovation (Hermans, 1996): firstly, taking a new I-position allows for the acquisition of, or, more correctly, the construction of, new information; secondly, a position may facilitate interaction and interlocution with others within the individual’s social milieu. Simply put, each time a new I-position is taken the system alters; much like a parallel distributed processor. Hermans (2003) later refined this process and argued that there were three ways in which the dialogical self can innovate itself: firstly, a new position may be introduced into the system; secondly, background or latent positions may move to the foreground; and finally, two or more positions co-operate to form a new sub-system—a coalition (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2004).

As the I moves from one position to another in its imagined space it creates moments of self-negotiation, self-contradiction, and self-integration. Hermans (2002b)
graphically represented the dialogical self as a field of interconnected, moving dots, which represent I-positions, some connected and some not. A person’s I-positions may be internal with reference to parts of oneself (e.g., I as mother) or external with reference to others or parts of the environment (e.g., my friend). The field is divided by a permeable frontier with two semi-circles, one half consisting of internal and the other external positions, with I-positions exchanging dialogue with one another at any moment in time. Salient positions are up-front and toward the frontier between internal and external; quiet and unheard positions are diminished and distal. Hermans (2003) also commented that the boundaries between domains of positions may vary or be permeable as a condition of the contemporary world.

Figure 6. Herman’s model of I-positions in the self.

From “Model of positions in the self” by Hermans, H. J. M. (2002). The dialogical self: One person, different stories. In Y. Kashima, M. Foddy & M. Platow (Eds.), Self and
Meaning is generated when an individual moves from one I-position to another (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). This meaning-generation process was originally demonstrated in a study of individuals’ engagement in an imagined dialogue with a woman figure in a painted portrait (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). This process required three steps: An individual presented a meaningful statement to the woman, the individual imagined her response, and then, finally, he or she responded to the imagined response. In order to construct useful meaning, there must be at least three movements in the dialogical exchange across positions: rather than simply A to B and then B to A, the person must dialogue again from A to B (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Collective Voices

Dialogue is not simply a matter of individuals communicating with one another, or an individual communicating in dialogue with his or her self across positions. Individuals also engage in dialogue with the collective voices of groups within their social and cultural contexts (Hermans, 2001b, 2002b, 2003). This dialogue may well be real and audible; however, it also occurs within the individual as imagined dialogue. Collective voices also have the capacity to constrain the meanings that may be derived from dialogue because of the rules of a particular shared discourse. I may speak subjectively for, or objectively of, myself; but I may also speak as a member of the profession psychologist, speaking the knowledge of that profession (but not of what I cannot ethically say); or as a member of a political party (but not its opposition); and as a father of two sons (but not of a daughter); all the while assuming the discourse of
those positions which I share, or not, with pertinent others. There is a reflexive interchange between individual and collective voices. They inherently affect one another. “The voice on the higher, superordinate level brings together and organises a specific combination of voices at the lower, subordinate level. At the same time, the latter level gives a personal touch to the former level” (Hermans, 2002a, p. 149).

**Assessment of Dialogical Self**

There have been no specific assessment processes or techniques, founded upon the Theory of Dialogical Self, which have been articulated in the career development literature. The two predominant means of assessing or understanding a person’s dialogical self in the context of psychotherapeutic counselling are the *Self-confrontation Method* (Hermans, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1999, 2001c, 2001d; Hermans, Fiddelaers, de Groot, & Nauta, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993; Lyddon, Yowell, & Hermans, 2006) and the *Personal Position Repertoire* (Hermans, 2001b, 2002b, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2004). These two assessment processes will be described briefly because they represent a substantial operationalisation of the theory of dialogical self. There has also been an emergence of new a process derived from the theory of dialogical self: the *Personality Web* (Raggatt, 2000). Alternative approaches to dialogical self have been mooted (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004) and include, for example, the *Assimilation Model* (Osatuke, Gray, Glick, Stiles, & Barkham, 2004; Stiles, Osatuke, Glick, & Mackay, 2004) and *Dialogical Sequence Analysis* (Leiman, 2004). Notwithstanding their relationship to theory of dialogical self and concomitant therapeutic procedures, the alternative processes will not be described here, as they are not germane to the research project.
Self-confrontation Method. The Self-confrontation Method is derived from Valuation Theory (Hermans, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1999; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). The Theory of Dialogical Self and Valuation Theory are distinct constructions; however it is worthwhile succinctly summarising the tenets of valuation theory because of its extensive application by Hermans and others in their research into dialogical self using the Self-confrontation Method. Valuation Theory holds that a valuation is an active process in which an individual constructs affectively-laden meaning in reference to some important element of his or her life—real or imagined. A single valuation can be conceived of as a unit of meaning that has attendant positive, negative, or ambivalent status for the individual. Valuations are organised into systems through the process of self reflection. The spatiality of emotion is emphasised in valuation theory: feeling joy is feeling up or high, whereas feeling miserable is feeling down or low (cf. verticality schema). Valuation theory also includes two motivation constructs: the S-motive and the O-motive. The S-motive pertains to the striving for self-enhancement and self-maintenance. The O-motive pertains to establishment of contact and union with other people and the world. Valuations may represent gratifications of the two motives. According to the dialogical self perspective, each I-position would have unique valuations and these evaluations take part in the dialogical exchange amongst positions.

The Self-confrontation Method has been described in comprehensive detail by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995). The process entails (a) the construction of personal valuations, (b) the connection of valuations to terms of affect that would describe an individual’s affective meaning for each, and (c) a discussion between counsellor and client to elaborate on the meaning of the valuations. This process is repeated on two or three occasions, with weeks or months intervening. Clients are disavowed of preconceptions that the method is akin to an objective, diagnostic process.
akin to traditional psychometric assessment; instead clients are encouraged to apprehend
the process as one in which he or she “must function as the I who studies the Me in
collaboration with the psychologist” (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995, p.33).

The client and counsellor firstly co-construct the client’s valuations in response
to a set of standard questions (which have been reproduced in Table 1) pertaining to
past, present and future. The valuations are then rated by the client, using a typical
Likert-scale, with respect to how he or she feels using a standard set of emotional terms
as indicators—negative and positive (e.g., joy, happiness, despondency,
disappointment). Scores for S (i.e., S-motive affects), O (i.e., O-motive affects), P (i.e.,
global positive affects), and N (i.e., global negative affects) are then calculated on the
basis of the ratings. A ratio between P and N is then calculated for each valuation to
determine well-being in relation to it; that is, the client feels generally more positive,
more negative, or equivalent for each valuation. The final index, G, is calculated in
response to a question regarding how the client has generally felt in recent times
according to the affect terms provided for the other valuations. Reliability coefficients
are then calculated for S, O, P, N and G. This process produces a matrix of coefficients
with valuations in the y-axis and their corresponding S, O, P, N and G values in the x-
axis. This numerical process is the core of the quantitative aspect of the Self-
confrontation Method and may be used interpretively in counselling.
Table 1

*Questions of the Self-confrontation Method*

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**Set 1: The past**

These questions are intended to guide you to some aspect of your past life that is of great importance to you:

- Was there something in your past that has been of major importance or significance for your life and which still plays an important part today?
- Was there, in the past, (a) person(s), and experience, or a circumstance that greatly influenced your life and still appreciably affects your present existence?

You are free to go back into the past as far as you like.

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**Set 2: The present**

This set is also composed of two questions that will lead you, after a certain amount of thinking, to formulate a response:

- Is there in your present life something that is of major importance for, or exerts a great influence on, your existence?
- Is there in your present life (a) person(s) or a circumstance which exerts a significant influence on you?

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**Set 3: The future**

The following questions will again be found to guide you to a response:

- Do you foresee something that will be of great importance for, or of major influence on, your future life?
- Do you feel that (a) certain person(s) or circumstance will exert a great influence on your future life?
- Is there a future goal or object which you expect to play an important role in your life?

You are free to look as far ahead as you wish.

The entire process follows a cycle of investigation-validation-investigation (Hermans, 1999) in the assessment of a client’s self-narrative. After the initial construction of valuations the process is repeated weeks or months later with the client being confronted by his or her original (or previous) valuations. Through discussion the valuations may be reformulated, replaced, discarded, or have alternatives added. The process may be repeated again at a later date. In all of this quantitative work, it is the client going through the process of hearing his or her voice and valuations over again, that generates dialogical exchange. It is as if the client is talking back to himself or herself and with the counsellor at a different point in time (and therefore space).

*Personal Position Repertoire.* Although not nearly as well articulated in the literature—when compared with the Self-confrontation Method—the Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b) offers another method of facilitating dialogical exchange in accordance with the theory of dialogical self. The Personal Position Repertoire involves both qualitative and quantitative processes, as does the Self-confrontation Method. The client is given a list consisting of 50 internal positions (e.g., I as man, I as partner) and 40 external positions (e.g., my friend, my house). Internal positions may be personal or social. The social positions pertain to broad societal functions, such as roles (e.g., mother), whereas personal positions are internally focused (e.g., caring person). The client selects which positions are present in his or her life and may add new positions to the list.

Having established the internal and external positions they are opposed to one another across and $x$ and $y$ axes to form a matrix. The client estimates the degree to which each internal position is prominent in relation to each external position using a rating scale from $0 = \text{not at all prominent}$, to $5 = \text{very considerable}$. A correlation coefficient can be used to study the inter-relationships among social and personal
positions. Each rating is summed to give an overall prominence score for each position.

The client and counsellor select particular positions for discussion, comparison and contrast, and interpretation. Positions that are prominent, or significant, for an individual client are then pursued through a process that essentially engages the Self-confrontation Method with its attendant valuations for positions and affect rating process (i.e., S, O, P, N). Hence a client may explore valuations and emotions from two or more I-positions and construct dialogical relations among them.

*The Personality Web.* The Personality Web (Raggatt, 2000) approach to assessment of the dialogical self is markedly different from those developed by Hermans and colleagues because it is not founded upon the notions of valuation theory (Hermans, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1999; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) and its attendant motive constructs (e.g., S-motive, O-motive). The Personality Web nevertheless operationalises the tenets of the theory of dialogical self. The technique involves application of a semi-structured interview protocol in which clients work through four topics: (a) people (e.g., liked associate, disliked public figure), (b) objects-in-the-world (e.g., important possession, place-in-the-world), (c) life events (peak childhood experience, nadir adult experience), and (d) body orientations (e.g., liked body part, weak body part). The specific inclusion of a discussion of the body is a noteworthy point, in that this element of the technique brings a felt, corporeal sense to the interview and the client understanding him- or herself as a body too; this is another important way in which the technique differs from the Self-confrontation Method and Personal Position Repertoire. A typical interview took up to three hours and clients were sent a copy of the interview protocol the week prior in order to stimulate their thinking on the topics. They were encouraged to write notes for each element.
In the second phase of the Personality Web, the client rates the degree to which their attachments (akin to valuations) are associated with one another using a 9-point Likert scale. As with the Self-confrontation Method and Personal Position Repertoire, these numerical indicators provided a useful means of recording the relationships amongst a client’s attachments as hypothetical chunks of meaning which provided grist for analysis in counselling.

Concluding Remarks

These preceding sub-sections provided an overview of STF, the Theory of Career Construction, and Theory of Dialogical Self; all of which can be related to contextualism and constructivisms. They were presented firstly as a promising response to the epistemological issues raised in the Parenthetic Consideration presented in the first chapter. They also inevitably lead to a more detailed analysis of a person’s construction of his or her career within context. The exploration of personal construction and that process’ relationship to career counselling will be explicated in this research project. Moreover, the self-constructive process is examined through the literature of narrative theory of self and narrative career counselling.
CHAPTER THREE:

NARRATIVE APPROACH TO CAREER COUNSELLING

*Life as a product of life.* However far man may extend himself with his knowledge, however objective he may appear to himself – ultimately he reaps nothing but his own biography (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 238).

This chapter describes the narrative approach to career counselling. Before presenting a summary of the literature on this topic, and given that career can be conceived of as a social construction, an overview on the literature of narrative theory of self is presented first. Finally, the chapter contains an introduction to the primary theory of interest for this research project and commences the process of articulating that theory into the field of career development and narrative career counselling.

**Narrative Theory of Self**

Along with its progenitors, constructivist and social constructionist theories, narrative psychologies blossomed in the 1980s with the works of predominant theorists Jerome Bruner (1986) and Theodore Sarbin (1986) (Hermans, 1996). Bruner argued that there were two types of thinking: argumentation and storytelling. Argumentation refers to formal propositional thinking used in the logical, deductive formation of truths. Storytelling, on the other hand, is narrative thinking through which the world is explained for an individual in their context and time. The differences are akin to the relative positions of nomothetic and idiographic knowing. Sarbin drew upon the root metaphor of contextualism, and that narrative brought meaning to a person’s contexts of time and space.
This section introduces some of the theories of narrative psychology, particularly those that underpin the studies of this research project. A caveat is worthy of noting however. The term *narrative psychology* ostensibly implies a coherent body of literature, however, the literature is far from established or settled with considerable diversity across epistemological positions (Smith & Sparkes, 2006).

**Process and Structure of Narrative**

The narrative approach to psychology encompasses a range of theories and research methods, yet remains inchoate with respect to a firm definition of its paradigmatic composition (Hoshmand, 2005). Polkinghorne (1988) claimed that *story* and *narrative* were equivalent. It is assumed here, therefore, that *life theme* and narrative are interchangeable concepts within the theoretical context of career.

Adopting a narrative purview on identity firstly requires differentiation between *objective career* and *subjective career*. Objective career is that phenomenon studied by traditional, mechanical, logical-positive schools of vocational psychology, whereas subjective career is based upon the ordinary assumptions of humanity (Chen, 1998). Objective career is a view of a person’s career from the outside, whereas subjective career is the experience lived by a person (Christensen & Johnston, 2003). As a source of identity, narrative provides a means through which a person can construct subjective career and give meaning to objective career.

The theory of narrative is strongly related to constructivisms (Rosen, 1996), in both its epistemology and ontology. As with the contestable distinction between constructivism and social constructionism, there has been some ambiguity with the term *narrative* (Hoshmand, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988). By way of introduction to his major work on the use of narrative in human sciences, including psychology, Polkinghorne (1988) attributed the following characteristics to narrative:
Narrative is a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join every day actions and events into episodic units. It provides framework for understanding the past events of one’s life and for planning future actions (p. 11).

Narrative can be conceived of as a linguistic structure (Russell & Wandrei, 1996) that is socially mediated. The notion of a personal plot is an important feature of narrative theory (Bujold, 2004; Ochberg, 1988). The defining features of narrative include: (a) its role in the organisation and interpretation of events and bringing order to disorder; (b) attributions of agency and causal links; (c) a beginning, middle and end; and (d) a way of constructing self as distinct from others and across time (Murray, 2003; Russell & Wandrei, 1996). Ricoeur suggested that narratives are organised into meaningful stories embedded across time and bound together by a plot, in a process described as emplotment; and that cultures provide generic plots around the individual (Jarvinen, 2004; Ricoeur, 1992). Narrative can be viewed as a process of meaning making and also as a product—a story (Bujold, 2004). Ochberg (1988) highlighted that plots entail consistent characteristics, or signatures, across a person’s life and thus provide a psychological construct through which to understand the person over time; as distinct from specific characters, places and events.

Murray (2003) and Bruner (2004) emphasised that narratives do not occur in isolation from their social context. It is informative, consequently, to consider narrative from the perspective of the anthropology literature:

Across cultures, narrative emerges early in communicative development and is a fundamental means of making sense of experience. Narrative and self are inseparable in that narrative is simultaneously born out of experience and gives
shape to experience. Narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present, and the imagined worlds. Narrative also interfaces self and society, constituting a crucial resource for socializing emotions, attitudes, and identities (Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 19).

Ochs and Capps give primacy to language and its forms of discourse, grammar, words, and conventions as the grist of narrative and its role in identity. This does not at all seem unfamiliar or unreasonable to the student of constructivisms, especially of social constructionism. Given that Systems Theory Framework (STF) emphasises both proximal and distal influences upon an individual, this anthropological perspective emphasises the importance of linking the multiple discourses of the social and environmental levels to the individual.

Given that Savickas’s (2001b, 2005) notion of life themes was associated with the work of McAdams (1995, 1996), it is pertinent to expound McAdams’s review of the structure and function of narrative and “life stories” in some detail. McAdams suggested that life story is a contextually bound psychosocial construction that includes facts (e.g., birth, hair colour) and imaginative renderings of oneself over the three phases of time (i.e., past, present, future) in a coherent narrative. Integration is the primary function of the life story. A coherent narrative consolidates life events and circumstances and meaningfully connects them across time. Though the analogy of a story is useful, the notion of a fixed story, as if printed on the pages of a book, is eschewed on the basis that a narrative approach assumes that reinterpretation and re-writing can occur; so an event in the past or an expectation of the future may take on a new meaning.
McAdams (1993, 1996) proposed six features of life stories: *narrative tone*, *imagery*, *theme*, *ideological setting*, *nuclear episodes*, *imagos*, and the *endings*, as a generativity script. Narrative tone is the affective or attitudinal gist of the story (e.g., romantic, angry, hopeless, optimistic). Imagery can be used to convey the desired meaning and this may involve sensory imagery (e.g., smells, sounds) or linguistic devices (e.g., metaphor, simile). Themes describe the goal-directedness of a narrative and often involve the individual achieving success in some endeavour (i.e., agency) and submitting to some greater entity (i.e., communion). Ideological settings pertain to the religious, political, and ethical beliefs and values that are imbued into the individual’s narratives. Nuclear episodes are significant points in the narrative (e.g., highs, lows, ends, beginnings, turns). McAdams suggested that individuals could use nuclear episodes as crucial proof for self-constructed veracity of their narrative. Imagos are idealised personifications subsumed into the greater narrative (e.g., good boy, working class kid, the teacher, the clown, the peacemaker). Endings paradoxically serve to continue the story by constructing a bridge of continuation on to the next chapter or imaginably on to immortality.

McAdams (1996) proposed a developmental view of narratives as they change over time and suggested that there are common phases through which individuals pass. Briefly put, these phases include: (a) the prenarrative era, (b) the narrative era, and (c) the postnarrative era. He exemplified how individuals may experience developmental stages; however, a description of this hypothesised process is not warranted here, because the stages would readily translate to the developmental components of Savickas’s (2002) theory of career construction.

Whilst considering the health, or mental health, correlates of narrative, McAdams (1996) proposed that an individual’s narrative could be evaluated using six
standards of a “good life-story” (p. 315): *coherence, openness, credibility, differentiation, reconciliation, generative integration*. Coherence refers to a story’s internal veracity and of its making sense according to its own terms. Openness refers to flexibility for future possibilities and the leaving open of a number of potential story lines. Credibility is the balance between fact and fiction, empirical experience and narrative interpretation. Identity is constructed through narratives, however, that construction process must be based upon renderings of verifiable experience; that is “we construct representations of reality, but we do not construct reality itself” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43). The notion of differentiation suggests that over time, a person’s story should become more complex, and rich in detail and intricate facets. With this complexity come contradiction and challenge. A sound story should involve the reconciliation of these sometimes competing threads and the acceptance of compromise when faced with a multiplicity of choice. As with story endings, generative integration refers to the process of bringing higher order meaning to a story as a life or a phase of a life approaches its termination.

**Narrative and Personal Identity**

Because this thesis argues that narrative inherently defines a “person” it is useful to explicate the notion of person, trite, as this may seem. Chen (1997) suggested that the term “self” was equivocally defined, and more so in the post-industrial context, and, for convenience, equated self, individual, and person: the same is assumed here. Barresi and Juckes (1997) promulgated narrative as a vehicle to understanding a person; and from their personology perspective, they characterised a person as follows:

1. A person is a unity that is a self-conscious agent, an intentional being.
2. A person has purposes, of which he or she is aware, and knowledge that he or she uses to achieve those purposes.
3. A person has a past, of which he or she takes possession, and a future tended toward by actions in the present.

4. A person feels the power to act and take responsibility for actions.

5. A person is aware of his or herself as a person, and can reflect upon past and future as a continuum; across beginnings, middles, and ends.

6. A person’s actions in the present are seen as embedded in time and the world in which they are performed.

7. Events are experienced in terms of intentions and purposes, beliefs and desires, fears, hopes and dreams.

8. Life and an individual’s person are experienced as an ongoing storylike (sic) structure, constantly transforming, and becoming meaningful; however, individuals are not always consciously narrating the story as it transpires (p. 694).

Barresi and Juckes claimed that although narrative is relatively new grist for the science of personology, other significant psychological theorists have used narrative in their work on identity (e.g., William James, Sigmund Freud, Henry Murray, and Erik Erikson). Runyan (1983) likewise highlighted Gordon Allport’s pioneering work in the use of narrative, idiographic methods to understand individual persons. George Kelly’s (1955) *Psychology of Personal Constructs* is also a significant theory with respect to the position of language within the process of a person constructing their own identity.

Narrative, as a linguistic structure (Russell & Wandrei, 1996), relates to two important assumptions of social constructionism that (a) mental functions operate symbolically, and that (b) symbol systems are acquired socially (Harre, 2000). Harre suggested that individuality from the social constructionist frame is based upon embodiment and upon mastery of first-person and second-person grammar. In this way
an individual forms his or her own unique perspective and the capacity to take that of another. These criteria indicate a role for language in the formation of identity.

Ricoeur (1992) has managed to draw an ontological solution for the problematic relationship between language and identity, using personal narrative as the connective fabric of his position. According to Ricoeur’s thesis, self-understanding comes through the telling and listening of personal narrative; a cyclical process of simultaneously reflecting and shaping identity (Jarvinen, 2004). Ricoeur (1992) argued against the Cartesian notion of mind as independent from body and world, and also, that notion’s radical opposite of self being nothing but a set of mechanistic processes (Dauenhauer, 2002). For Ricoeur, the self is physically embodied as one and the same as “selfhood”; people are bodies and possess bodies simultaneously in space and time. The self is not an ethereal metaphysical entity that can be distinct from a body; the body and the I are one (Atkins, 2003). This distinction is important for understanding the relationship between actions of the body and language as action and subsequently, narrative as the vehicle for living selfhood over a lifetime (Ricoeur, 1989, 1992). Moreover, a person has the capacity, through discourse, to identify his/her self as distinct from others and engage in action of their personal narrative (Ricoeur, 1992). All of this is not an isolated process of the individual. The person is intrinsically part of their social and discursive milieu; and Ricoeur suggests that culture provides the individual with ready-made plots that aid understanding of the world (Jarvinen, 2004).

Polkinghorne (1990) identified events, personal action, past, present and future as key constituents of narrative and that their nexus produces meaning and ongoing construction of self. Polkinghorne (1990) wrote:

The narrative scheme is the intellectual process that relates human activities to one another and makes them meaningful. It reveals purpose and direction in
human affairs and makes individual human lives comprehensible. ….. The
ordering of relationships by the narrative scheme results from its power to bind a
sequence of events into a unified happening; it makes individual events
comprehensible by identifying the whole to which they contribute (p. 94).

This self-constructive identity-constructive function of narrative is paramount to the
constructivist and social constructionist accounts of identity. Polkinghorne
differentiated narratives from simple historical recounting or chronicling of life events;
which per se do not provide a synthesis toward personal meaning.

Narrative may not necessarily underpin one coherent story of a single unified self:

A life story is an internalised and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates
the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future. ….. a person
may have more than one life story, or the overall life story itself may consist of a

McAdams argued that a good life story should be a collection of multiple stories that
also suggested that individuals differentially choose which elements to hang together in
the process of constructing their narratives.

There is a bi-directional relationship between autobiographical memory and
identity (Wilson & Ross, 2003). With reference to the choosing of elements from the an
individual’s past, Pasupathi (2001) demonstrated considerable support for the idea that
narrative identity can be influenced by the telling and retelling of memories in
conversation with others. This co-construction was conceived of as an outcome of not
simply the speaker telling his or her story, but social and interpersonal triadic complex
of the speaker and listener in context. In this interactive complex the listening
interlocutor has the capacity to influence the recall of memories and the presentation of those recollections.

A radical conception of narrative indicates that the nexus between the speaking of an autobiographical narrative and a life is so tight that they eventually become one another in a reflexive process: “In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner, 2004, p. 694) [original italics]. Furthermore, Bruner argued that those cultural and linguistic processes guide the telling of autobiographic narratives and exert influence upon how an individual perceives, remembers, and articulates his or her narrative. Bruner’s suggestion reverberates that individuals are born into myriad discourses, from family to culture, which they must negotiate with and use to determine truth (Rosen, 1996). This is supportive of the notion that identity is not something inside a person’s head (or heart), but a construction based upon discourses in which the person is ineluctably inhered (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a; Guichard, 2005). Construction of identity is thus delimited to the discursive context of the individual. Contextualisation of narrative and identity in this way concentrates thinking upon conversations through which identity can be established and changed through social process (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a; Saari, 1996). This emphasises that dialogue with oneself (internally) and others (interpersonally) is involved in the construction of identity over a lifetime (Guichard, 2005); this process may also include conversations overheard.

Mignot (2004) suggested that career is a personal and social phenomenon that involves objects in the world and a shared language system. They interact with one another in an indissoluble relationship over time. Mignot asserted “in order to encapsulate the irreducible hermeneutic characteristic of career, a non-linear form of representation is required” (p. 468); metaphor was posited as the appropriate form. He
My Career Chapter

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did not limit the term *metaphor* to the linguistic, poetic device; instead he expanded it to include visual forms; and more broadly described consciousness itself as a metaphor of reality—an analogue. His exposition of metaphor in the process of constructing identity and career highlighted the distinction between metaphor’s capacity to *define* and *confine* the construction of reality. Accordingly, metaphor—as an analogue of reality—takes on the capacity to establish boundaries around phenomena, and therefore controls subsequent conceptualisation of the world. These assumptions are important because they tether consciousness, self, action, language (or at least shared communication systems), and career, across time.

Narrative Career Counselling

The clarion to a narrative approach to career (Collin & Young, 1986; Savickas, 1992, 1993) has generated a substantive body of literature on the theories of career and practices of career counselling (Bujold, 2004). There is an important relationship between subjective career identity and personal narrative in the literature of constructivisms (Bujold, 2004) and historically identity has featured in career development theory (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). Having espoused the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton & McMahon, 1999) and the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005) as viable theoretical frameworks through which a constructivisms view of career may be elaborated, there still remains an important theoretical foundation to be laid. This section\(^1\) describes a narrative approach to career counselling and concludes with a summary of narrative career counselling techniques pertinent to the studies of this research project.

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A number of approaches to career counselling have been founded upon constructivisms and the relationship between identity, narrative, language, meaning and career (McMahon & Patton, 2006c; Savickas, 1997b); and these parallel the burgeoning of narrative approaches in other forms of counselling (Warwar & Greenberg, 2000). Nevertheless, the differences and similarities amongst the terms constructivist, interpretive, narrative, and biographical leave some scope for confusion (Reid, 2006b). The narrative approach to career can be nevertheless conceptualised through constructivisms (Bujold, 2004). This sub-section serves to outline the narrative approach to career counselling. It begins by defining career counselling in a manner that is sympathetic to constructivisms, then describes the predominant features of narrative career counselling, and then presents examples of techniques used in narrative career counselling.

At the early emergence of constructivisms within the field of career counselling, Savickas (1993) portended the features of career counselling in the contemporary era. He suggested that the expert model would give way to a counselling model in which the participants worked in a collaborative relationship. Furthermore, he asserted that career counsellors would practice within cultural context to remove tacit barriers to individuals’ development and support their enablement in society, rather than their “fit”. The work of career counsellors would involve facilitating individuals’ transcendence (or escape) from the grand narratives of society, and the formation of unique personal frameworks. In all of this, the artificial distinction between personal and career counselling would be lost amidst the realisation that career is personal and larger than the labour of work (cf. Richardson, 1993). Savickas, like contemporaries Collin and Young (1986), emphasised the meaning-making, or hermeneutic endeavour, of career counselling.
Despite the passage of more than two decades since that theoretical insurgence, it would be inappropriate to make a claim on a definitive summary of the features of narrative career counselling because, at this stage, this collection of ideas and methods is nascent and still evolving. Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to claim that the single most significant text on narrative career counselling that emanated during those early years was produced by Cochran (1997). “Cochran provides one of the first books on career counselling. Yes, we have numerous books with ‘career counselling’ in the title, ….. Cochran is the first to elaborate in such fine detail a career counselling theory” (Savickas, 1997c, p. vii).

Notwithstanding the caveat that the field is relatively unarticulated, there are significant features that distinguish the narrative approach from traditional approaches to counselling. Patton and McMahon (2006b) produced a comprehensive summary of the differences between the traditional, logical-positivist and the constructivist approaches, but specifically related it to the field of career counselling. Their summary is presented in Table 2. Although this summary broadly covers constructivisms, it applies equally to the narrative approach.

Table 2

*Influence of Logical-positive and Constructivist Worldviews on Career Counselling*
This table is not available online. Please consult the hardcopy thesis available from the QUT Library.
Career Counselling Defined

Before entering into the features of narrative career counselling, it is worthwhile reviewing the definition of career counselling. There are important fissures that should be acknowledged before entering into a description of the theories of career counselling practice and these fissures have been variously debated in the literature on convergence-divergence in career theory and on the theory of practice (Lent & Savickas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1992; Savickas, 1995b). Firstly, theories of career choice and development are not necessarily theories for the practice of career development (Subich & Simonson, 2001). Secondly, the theories of career development practice do not yet sufficiently account for the actual doing of career development practices. Thirdly, career counselling is but one of the various forms of career development practice.

In response to a burgeoning literature and discourse on divergence and convergence in career development theories and practice (e.g., Savickas, 1995b, 2001b; Savickas & Lent, 1994), Savickas (1994a) outlined a framework for a possible convergent model of career development services, of which career counselling is only one. Herr (1997) provided a useful summary of Savickas’s conceptualisation of the practices of career development services, through rhetorical questions that a client may pose to a career development practitioner or to himself or herself:


5. How can work help me grow as a person? — career therapy.


Occupational placement assists individuals to secure employment in an occupation for which they have already selected and/or trained and involves the provision of job search and application services. Vocational guidance facilitates individuals’ articulation of their behavioural repertoire (e.g., occupational interests, skills, and abilities) into vocational choices. Career education assists individuals to manage their career and developmental vocational tasks through the facilitation of skills such as planning and decision-making. Therapy assists individuals to develop a clear vocational identity in context of personal issues. Position coaching assists individuals who face specific occupational problems and require assistance with adjustment and coping. Career counselling facilitates individuals’ self-reflection and elaboration of self-concepts toward an enhanced self-understanding and personal meaning. This definition highlights the essentially meaning-oriented, if not hermeneutic endeavour that is career counselling; hence the vitality of personal narrative in career exploration. This précis cannot fully capture Savickas’s intent; however, it does serve to illustrate that there are subtle and important differences between the various forms of career development practices.

Career counselling is a broad term that can be used to subsume a variety of diverse activities, derived from an equally diverse corpus of theories; for example, trait-and-factor, person-environment fit, person-centred, psychodynamic, developmental, social learning, social psychological, computer-assisted (Subich & Simonson, 2001; Walsh & Osipow, 1990). Career counselling takes differing forms and has been defined variously, but the following will suffice as an organising concept:
A largely verbal process in which a professional counselor and counselee(s) are in a dynamic and collaborative relationship, focused on identifying and acting on the counselees’ goals, in which the counselor employs a repertoire of diverse techniques or processes, to help bring about self-understanding, understanding of the career concerns involved and behavioural options available, as well as informed decision making in the counselee, who has the responsibility for his or her own actions (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, p. 42) [original spelling, my italics].

The italicised text serves to emphasise the meaning-making process of career counselling and its contextualisation against the backdrop of the dynamic relationship, and the client’s concerns and actions. Two key features of this definition with respect to this project are the largely verbal process and collaborative relationship. It will be argued in this thesis that the conversation is a collaborative project toward construction and co-construction of career narratives.

In discussing his view of the careers industry (within North America), Herr (1997) summarised some of the major evolutionary movements in career counselling:

1. However career counselling is defined, its principal content is the perceptions, anxieties, information deficits, work personalities, competencies and motives that person experiences in their interactions with their external environment.
2. Career counselling is not a singular process. In the professional literature, the term is used to summarise a range of interventions applied both to individuals and to groups.
3. Career counselling is no longer conceived as a process principally focused on ensuring that adolescents make a wise choice of an initial job.
4. Career counselling may be considered the preferred intervention of choice, but it is likely that, given the multiple problems many persons experience as they attempt to resolve career problems, it may be but one of a programme of interventions including career guidance, retraining, financial subsidies, psychological support processes, and acquisition and evaluation of information, to deal with emotional or behavioural disorders.

5. Career counselling may best be thought of as a continuum of intervention processes which range from facilitating self and occupational awareness, exploration of possibilities and the learning of career planning skills, to stress reduction or anger management, issues of indecisiveness, and work-adjustment issues that require fusion of career and personal counselling (pp. 84-86).

Herr’s summary is instructive because it indicates the breadth of career counselling’s purview, especially that it is not only a service for occupational fit. This is reflected in the holistic view of career, and career counselling, provided by the Systems Theory Framework (McMahon & Patton, 2006b; Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Narrative: Meaning for Living

As with humanistic counselling (Chen, 2001) and constructivist counselling (Mahoney, 2003) the pursuit of meaning is a crucial activity of narrative career counselling. In this post-industrial, or late modern era, the individual is confronted with a range of challenges in creating their career identity: (a) drawing upon personal feelings, (b) differentiating self from others, (c) developing a personal narrative, (d) representing experience in one’s own terms, (e) focusing a point-of-view, (f) building an inner life, and (g) relating all to one’s own purpose (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). All of these challenges require subjective engagement with the world and it is personal
narrative that provides subjective coherence over a lifetime (Guichard, 2005). Law et al. argue that the development of career identity is more than a simple social learning process (cf. Bujold (2004)) and suggest that it has become an inherently reflexive, complex learning process. Meijers (1998) suggested that career identity was a “structure or network of meanings in which the individual consciously links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles” (p. 200) and that this was constantly changing due to the individual’s exposure to new learning experiences. The process toward meaning, and identity, is the work and objective of constructivist counselling and narrative career counselling.

Cochran (1997) argued that meaning is created in at least three ways. Firstly, the *purpose* of something generates meaning for that thing; without purpose then meaning is diminished. The degree to which a thing can be elaborated and articulated into the multivarious elements of a person’s life is a measure of meaning; it has meaning because it has *implications* for the person. Thirdly, meaning is generated if something has a comprehensible, *sensible point* (e.g., an aphorism). Cochran suggested that narrative is an ideal vehicle for the creation of personal meaning, because:

1. A narrative provides a temporal organisation, integrating a beginning, middle, and end into a whole.
2. A story is a synthetic structure that configures an indefinite expansion of elements and spheres of elements into a whole.
3. The plot of a narrative carries a point (pp. 5-7).

In an ironic use of the term “matching”, Cochran suggested that individuals test out various narratives to match their lived reality and career. Matching in this sense does not imply stasis (as with personality fit); rather it indicates that a person’s narrative changes over time and under the influence of lived conditions, in accordance to the
ideal and the optional or possible narrative. In this way a narrative for the future must feel as if it is true for the individual and they must identify with it and own it.

Though constructivist counselling may be seen as a product of cognitive psychology and its forms of counselling, its epistemological assumptions vary along with its ontology that language is paramount in the construction of an individual’s reality (Warwar & Greenberg, 2000). Peavy’s SocioDynamic (Peavy, 2000a, 2000b) approach to (career) counselling was based on the assumption that language played a crucial role in the formation of identity in social context: “Human life is linguistic life. Our tools for construction of distinctly human patterns of living are human utterances, sentences, words and symbols” (2000b, p. 20). In order to capture the uniquely human construction of personal identity, Peavy (1979) described human beings as homo creator and counselling as facilitation of individuals narrating their multiple selves (Peavy, 2000a). Peavy suggested that a person’s story of him or herself is in a process of never-ending re-authoring. Campbell and Ungar (2004a) likewise adhere language, thoughts and identity as inseparable in their application of narrative family therapy to career development.

As with a story, the plot or plots characterise the story and bring coherence, structure, and a heuristic through which to understand the entire work. Though facts from a person’s past and present are important in the narrative process (Chen, 1997), constructing a useful, meaningful career narrative is not simply a matter of recounting events, rather it is about connecting life events into a meaningful whole (Christensen & Johnston, 2003; Meijers, 1998; Reid, 2006b). A career narrative revealed (Brott, 2001, 2004) and analysed in counselling may seek to determine the characteristic signature, or plots, of a person’s career over his or her life (Cochran, 1997; Ochberg, 1988; Savickas, 2005). A career narrative constructed in counselling should take a future orientation
(Cochran, 1997) with an awareness of uncertainty and the need to compromise (Chen, 1997, 2004).

Career is Personal

The narrative approach to career counselling has been influenced by the mainstream constructivist counselling. Furthermore, there is a considerable body of literature which presents an argument that the distinction between career counselling and personal (clinical) counselling is inappropriate (e.g., Anderson & Niles, 1995; Betz & Corning, 1993; Bingham, 2002; Brown & Brooks, 1985; Imbibo, 1994; Krumboltz, 1993; Lewis, 2001; Manuele-Adkins, 1992; McMahon & Patton, 2002b). The narrative approach to career counselling has certainly emphasised the need for holistic understanding and the personal nature of career.

Rigazio-DiGilio (2001) described counselling practices that were common to postmodern approaches to counselling, and she was referring specifically to those practices that would be subsumed by constructivisms. Counsellors and clients engage in a process of co-constructing interpretations of events and issues pertinent to counselling. These interpretations are intended to promote perspectives that transcend the problem and aim toward a solution. Counselling is a conversation context and the language of that conversation is used to make explicit the client’s social contingencies and to generate solutions on how he or she can actively participate in the world. This requires a full appreciation of the context of the individual and bringing that context into the conversation of counselling. Counselling focuses on reformulating life stories, or narratives, in a co-constructing manner, so as to empower clients to act in their world. Borrowing techniques from other counselling approaches is used to enhance the constructive process. Monitoring the progress of counselling is integrated within the process itself and is part of the movement toward client empowerment through new
meaning. Toward termination of counselling, the co-constructive process aims toward client’s independence and maintenance of new meanings in their world.

To further reinforce the amalgamation of personal and career counselling through the heuristic of constructivisms and narrative, it is worth while considering Winter’s (1996) comparison and contrasting of constructivist approaches to counselling psychology with other mainstream approaches that identified the following features:

1. Behavioural experimentation: as with behavioural approaches to counselling, clients are encouraged to “test” or “try-on” new behaviours in the environment; however, the client’s psychological construction of the new behaviours is the primary focus of counselling.

2. Thinking: as with rational cognitive approaches to therapy, the client’s thoughts are significant grist of the counselling experience; however, judgements of rationality are suspended and the structures and processes of thoughts are given primacy.

3. The past: as with psychodynamic approaches, the past may well be considered in the context of counselling; however there is no assumption of developmental stages through which an individual must pass in order to be psychologically healthy and interpretation is used not as act toward insight but a process of offering alternative ways of construing of the client’s situation.

4. Emotion: as with humanistic approaches emotions are considered fully in the context of counselling; however differs in its admission of assessment processes into the counselling context.
5. Challenge: as with family systems approaches, challenging client’s is part of the counselling process; however, constructivist approaches are less adversarial.

All of these elements would be familiar to the career counsellor who practises through constructivisms and narrative counselling.

Having asserted that career counselling and personal counselling are similar activities, it is necessary to cast the light of an alternative perspective on the question. Their separation or amalgamation may also be an inadvertent artefact, or deliberate construction, of industry segmentation. Brown and Ryan-Krane (2000) suggest that the vigour of the amalgamation argument is related to the socio-economic contingency of attracting beginning counselling professionals into the career development industry, rather than the clinical industries—indeed a subtle point which reinforces the necessity to contextualise theory and practice (McIlveen & Patton, 2006).

**Emotion**

The theoretical body of career development has been criticised for its lack of inclusion of emotion (Kidd, 1998b, 2004; Meijers, 2003). A scan through the index pages of major contemporary texts upholds this criticism by way of limited references to the topic of emotion (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2005). It is as if forming career identity is a completely cognitive and rational process. However, with respect to subjective career and identity, there is a strong emphasis upon meaning in ways that parallel humanistic psychologies’ preponderance around meaning-making and emotion (Chen, 2001). This connection is not lost of emerging views of career and identity in which emotion is an intrinsic and explicit part of the process of narrative self-construction of career identity (Meijers, 1998, 2003; Young & Valach, 2000; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002). Furthermore, emotion has been demonstrated playing a key role in the narrative and
conversations in which career is the content (Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002). It would be tempting to speculate that this lack of emphasis upon emotion is by-product of the traditional (vocational) psychologies’ being founded upon notions of Cartesian self—a mind decapitated and heartless.

**Action**

Despite its language orientation, a narrative approach to career does not eschew individual action and agency in context (Christensen & Johnston, 2003; Reid, 2006b), especially because of the need for active engagement in a learning environment for the development of career identity (Meijers, 1998). The process of career decision-making involves the development of a narrative—ideal and optional—that can steer the person productively into their future (Cochran, 1997); hence narrative has an interdependent relationship with action. Narrative makes action intelligible, and action engenders personal agency. In this way narrative takes on an adaptive function, which may be compared to the construct of *career adaptability* mooted by Savickas (1997a, 2005).

The Contextual Action Theory of career (Young & Valach, 1996, 2000, 2004; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002) explicitly tethers self-construction and narrative to the process of action and emotion. Young and Valach (2000) suggest that the Contextual Action Theory operationalises social constructionism because it emphasises the role of action within social processes, and moreover, addresses the individualism of other theories. This theory hierarchically posits action across time on a continuum of systems beginning with personal, *individual action*, then *joint action*, then *project*, which are subsumed by the superordinate, lifelong action of *career*. Actions may be considered from the perspectives of *manifest behaviour*, *internal processes*, and *social meaning*. The later perspective embeds action within social practices, cultures, and discourses. Action is organised hierarchically from the level of *elements*, to *functional steps*, and
finally to goals. The Contextual Action Theory refers to the process of interpretation as one through which individuals make sense of action in context; hence the actions and context of a narrative are inseparable, lest they become meaningless. Young and Valach (2004) suggest that the contextual action theory of career is a substantive operationalisation of the fourth level of Savickas’s earlier formulation of his comprehensive metatheory of career development (i.e., mechanisms of development) (Savickas, 2001b).

The Coalition of Assessment and Intervention

Qualitative assessment for career counselling is predominantly based upon constructivism (McMahon & Patton, 2002b; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003; Whiston & Rahardja, 2005). An important feature of narrative approach is that its assessment procedures on the whole are qualitative. This is inherently due to the epistemological differences of the theories that eschew traditional theory and practices. Moreover, the distinction between assessment and intervention blurs within the constructivisms and narrative frameworks because the process of assessment tends to be intrinsic to the counselling process (Mahoney, 2003; Patton & McMahon, 2006c; Schultheiss, 2005); assessment is counselling, not simply fact gathering. This is best exemplified by the integration of qualitative assessment procedures within the counselling process (McMahon & Patton, 2002b; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003; Savickas, 1992; Whiston & Rahardja, 2005) such as semi-structured interviews that flow with the counselling dialogue (Schultheiss, 2005).

Co-constructed Meaning

The relationship between client and counsellor is paramount in constructivist counselling (Mahoney, 2003). Narrative career counselling entails a meaning-making process through which the client creates his or her life with the assistance of a co-
creator: the counsellor (Bujold, 2004; Collin & Young, 1986; Peavy, 2000a; Reid, 2005).

Acting as co-authors and editors of these narratives, counsellors can help clients (1) authorise their careers by narrating a coherent, continuous, and credible story, (2) invest career with meaning by identifying themes and tensions in the story line, and (3) learn the skills needed to perform the next episode in the story (Savickas, 1993, p. 213).

The active presence of the counsellor in the process of counselling is the hallmark of narrative career counselling. This at once dismisses any notions of objectivity in the assessment and counselling process. This does not imply the transgression of boundaries in an ethical sense. It simply asserts that the counsellor and client are in it together and that there is no use in pretending otherwise. The client and counsellor are together in a unique system in which their two worlds coalesce, albeit temporarily (McMahon & Patton, 2006b; Patton & McMahon, 1999). This requires the counsellor be politically aware (Reid, 2006b) or at least be aware of their own system of influences and how they play out in the counselling process and dialogue.

*Summary*

The core features of narrative career counselling presented here include:

1. The fundamental idea that narrative career counselling serves the development of meaning.
2. Narrative career counselling is a profoundly personal process.
3. Narrative career counselling is based in emotion and action (and not simply thought);
4. Assessment and intervention are intertwined processes within narrative career counselling.
5. The client and counsellor work together collaboratively toward the construction of meaning. The following sub-section introduces a range of narrative techniques that are purported to operationalise the aforementioned features.

Exemplars of Narrative Career Counselling

There is a significant range of other approaches and techniques that could be useful in the process of narrative career counselling (e.g., McMahon & Patton, 2003). SocioDynamic counselling (Peavy, 2000b) and the work of Cochran (1997) stand as a leading examples of meaning-oriented career counselling but cannot be explicated in detail here due to space limitations. Only a sample of narrative procedures is presented here and those highlighted are typically qualitative and idiographic. They have been clustered around whether they are primarily spoken or written in process, or whether the client-counsellor dialogue—an inherent feature of narrative career counselling—is extended through visual or spatial procedures. A further sample of techniques was selected for a more detailed overview and presentation.

Spoken and written techniques. Spoken techniques include the career counselling for life themes (Savickas, 2005), the Storied Approach (Brott, 2001), the Thematic Extrapolation Method (Super, 1957), the Career Style Interview (Savickas, 1989b, 2005), the Life/Work design approach (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b), Working with Storytellers (McMahon, 2006, in press), and the Career Systems Interview (McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003). Written exercises such as autobiographies (Christensen & Johnston, 2003; McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005) add to the depth of the counselling dialogue and provide clients with a different modality of expression. The use of metaphor also operates as a vehicle for generating meaning (Meijers, 2003; Mignot, 2004).
*Visual and spatial techniques.* It would be inaccurate, or at least delimiting, to assume that all narrative techniques necessarily require a primarily spoken process (Reid, 2006b), or assume literary or poetic structure. Some of the significant visual and spatial techniques considered in the literature review include the life-line, life roles circles, card sorts, and goal map (Brott, 2004); construct laddering, drawing, family constellation, and guided fantasy (Cochran, 1997); career-o-gram (Thorngren & Feit, 2001); collage (Adams, 2003) and the My System of Career Influences reflection activity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005).

*Thematic-Extrapolation Method*

It would be theoretically incorrect to describe the life-span life-space theory of career (Super, 1957, 1980, 1985, 1992) as being of the constructivisms ilk, nor its assessment procedures as narrative. It is worth noting, however, that Super portended the emergence of narrative assessment techniques in his formulation of the *thematic-extrapolation method* (TEM) (Super, 1954). In his 1957 work, Super shied away from advancing this model in deference to the actuarial, quantitative methods; which is not surprising given the omnipresence and dominance of traditional paradigms at that time. The TEM entailed the collection of an individual’s history and details according to the various factors of Super’s model and then extrapolating from these data any patterns or trends that would enable prediction of the future, and ultimately assist in the process of career decision-making. Inherently qualitative, the method was informed by empirical tradition nevertheless. Though the TEM was never fully promulgated by Super, it later received a modicum of interest within the career development literature (Jepsen, 1994). The TEM is noteworthy here because it provides an historical lineage for narrative career assessment processes.
Savickas’s (2005) theory of career construction posited *life themes* as a crucial element to be addressed by the theory of career development and practice of career counselling. In this way personal narrative plays a pivotal role in the construction of career identity.

In telling their career stories about their work experiences, individuals selectively highlight particular experiences to produce a narrative truth by which they live. Counsellors who use career construction theory listen to clients’ narratives for the story lines of vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes (Savickas, 2005, p. 43).

Narrative is not, however, a simple and isolated process. Narrative can be conceived of as consisting of structural characteristics that go to make up a “good story”. It is also socially mediated and inhaled with the discourses of an individual’s context. In addition, Savickas clearly positions the counsellor in the mix of the construction of meaning.

Quite early in the emergence of constructivisms in the literature of career, Savickas (1992) posited the value of autobiographical methods, recollections, structured interviews, and card sorts as means of facilitating clients’ understanding of their life themes through the process of career counselling. His life-theme counselling model was presented as a process for dealing with career indecision and involved application of the Career Style Interview (Savickas, 1989b, 1995a, 2004, 2005). This procedure entailed:

1. Collecting stories from the client to as to reveal a life theme.
2. The counsellor narrating back to the client the life theme.
3. A discussion of the meaning of the client’s presenting problem (i.e., career indecision) in context of the revealed life theme.

4. Extension of the life theme into the future and extrapolation of it toward interests and occupations that correlate with the theme.

5. Rehearsal of the behaviours necessary for the specification and implementation of a career choice.

This is perhaps the most simple and elegant form of narrative career counselling. It is devoid of technical apparatus and embedded in a gentle and client-centred conversation. Some of the questions used by Savickas in this interview process, and application of the Career Style Interview (Savickas, 2004), include: *Who do you admire? Who would you like to pattern your life after? Do you have a favourite saying or motto?* The key to this process is the identification of a plot (cf., Cochran, 1997; Ochberg, 1988) within the story and theme of a client’s presentation. Savickas suggested that the elicitation of life themes required the counsellor to listen attentively for a history of deviations, trouble, or imbalance that inhere unique qualities to an individual’s history, and moreover, how the individual has taken those experiences to form identity. The counsellor then listens for how the client has used these experiences to make sense of his or life and move forward. In this way the interview is the primary vehicle for the revelation and construction of narrative and life themes (Savickas, 2002).

*The Storied Approach*

Brott’s (2001) *storied approach* to career counselling was founded upon the proposition that a person’s identity is bound up in his or her life story, which inherently speaks of career. This process involves *co-construction, deconstruction,* and *construction,* that is, respectively, to reveal, unpack and re-author (Brott, 2001, 2004); which is essentially a dynamic and intrinsically interwoven interchange between client
and counsellor through which information is combined to form a story for the client. This may involve both quantitative and qualitative information; but it is not the information per se that matters, instead, it is its interpretation into coherent meaning for the client.

During co-construction, the counsellor and client reveal the stories from the past and present. Deconstruction involves unpacking stories and seeking differing perspectives. Taking different perspectives is a process strongly emphasised by Chen (1997) who purported that it embeds the client’s story in context, encourages flexibility, and produces distinctive meaning that enhances potential and aspiration. The re-authoring phase involves the construction of new stories; throughout which the counsellor supports and poses questions to draw the story into the broader elements of the client’s life. In addition to the interview process, Brott endorses the use of qualitative and quantitative assessment procedures but emphasises that their use is for the construction of meaning rather than diagnostics (e.g., card sorts).

Life Chapters

The technique of life chapters used in career counselling was described by Cochran (1997). The process requires the client to construct an autobiography, and the following instructions have been used by Cochran:

If you were asked to write your autobiography, what would be the chapter titles? Now, we don’t want titles that could be used in everyone’s life story, like “Childhood” or “Elementary school years”, but titles that really reflect or sum up a particular period of your life. Let’s begin with the first chapter, and I will help you in trying to create the most meaningful chapter title (p. 74).
Cochran then goes on to enquire about the details of each period of the person’s life or significant events, experiences, or activities. The exercise is used also to enter into a prospective, future account of the client’s life through to death.

**Life/work Design**

The *life/work design* (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a, 2004b) approach to career counselling stands as an exemplar of constructivist approaches. It is theoretically embedded in constructivist thinking and attendant constructivisms. Campbell and Ungar suggested that there were key aspects in constructing a career, from the clients’ perspective:

1. Know what you want.
2. Know what you have.
3. Know what you hear.
5. Map your preferred story.
6. Grow into your story.
7. Grow out of your story (p. 53).

Campbell and Ungar specified a counselling process for each of these aspects of life/work design. They suggested that clients could become aware of the discourse in which they are immersed and engage with it to construct a new story. Within counselling these would mean identifying internal or external “voices” that need to be amplified (i.e., supportive) and diminished (i.e., negative or inhibitory). In addition, knowing what constrains the client involves identification and re-authoring stories that are more valuable for his or her future.
Career Systems Interview

With respect to the risk of an individualistic approach, the Systems Theory Framework (STF; McMahon & Patton, 2006b) offers a theoretical safeguard to ensure that the counselling process is an holistic one. The Career Systems Interview (McIlveen, 2003; McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003) is a semi-structured interview process in which the counsellor facilitates a free-flowing discussion with the client. The stimuli for discussion are the influences presented within the STF. Following an initial discussion to ascertain the presenting problem for career counselling, each influence is discussed with reference to the client’s understanding of it, their appreciation of it, and how he or she believes each affects his or her life and how they interact with one another.

Administratively, there is no particular order of discussion, as it tends to follow the client’s own direction in dialogue and moves seamlessly across the STF influences. The conversation is prefaced by the counsellor suggesting that discovering a career direction or making a career decision is so important that a lot of personal aspects need to be taken into account; as opposed to making a decision based upon interests alone. Anecdotes are provided to support this rationale. For example, being good at mathematics does not necessarily indicate taking a major in physics or accounting at university. Furthermore, there are no set or specific questions for the procedure. Emphasis is placed upon the experience being a relaxed conversation in which the client feels in control and in a space in which they can explore and speak their mind; rather than following a specific procedural path. An aim of the process is to create a space in which the client can hear his or her own voice openly talking about career, perhaps for the first time. Formal interpretation of themes by the counsellor is not hurried, as the process aims to allow sufficient flow of dialogue that the client arrives at, and abducts
his or her own interpretation for theme. Should formal interpretation take place, it generally follows the process used in life-theme counselling (Savickas, 1992, 1995a). The interview may well be followed by psychometric testing, career education activities, further elaborative interviews, or other specific narrative assessment and counselling techniques.

**My System of Career Influences (MSCI)**

The assessment technique My System of Career Influences (MSCI) reflection activity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005; McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005) provides a broad systemic assessment of a person’s career and involves clients drawing the influences of their career against the layers of their system of influences according to the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (McMahon & Patton, 2006b). Like the career-o-gram and life roles circles, it involves the drawing of images and connecting themes into a meaningful whole. The MSCI is suitable for group and individual administration; although group administration, without individual follow-up counselling, would likely diminish its utility for the development of an individual’s narrative in detail. The MSCI is one of the few formally evaluated, qualitative career assessment processes which are a working model of the STF.

**Summary**

With the exception of *My System of Career Influences* with its graphical dimensions, the narrative techniques summarised here are primarily verbal in content and process; they entail conversations and writing tasks. Conversation and writing are significant vehicles of exploration that essentially aim to construct themes for the client’s self-understanding. These themes are evoked by, and are present within, the narrative of the client in a forward-feed cyclical process—a chapter begets another chapter of a life.
As with *life themes* (Savickas, 2005), the literature of narrative career counselling may be further articulated in terms of the conversational processes of the relationship between the client’s narrative and his or her identity. In the absence of a meaningful dialogue between counsellor and client, none of the techniques presented here would stand as an independent process that would enable a client to generate useful narrative and meaning (an assertion that should equally hold true for classical psychometrics).

The terms narrative, story, and plot may well connote literary impressions, however, a meaningful narrative is not a work of literary fiction. These appropriated terms are metaphors for the work of career counselling and the construction of meaning for a person. Though some practitioners have creatively used elements and analogies from English literature (e.g., the case of Elaine; Savickas, 2005), this neither casts narrative career counselling as an endeavour to bring pre-existing stories to the life of an individual, nor does it demand that career counselling should take on the characteristics of creative story telling or essay writing that is full of flowery plot lines and intriguing characters—some life stories are subjectively and objectively humdrum and mundane, and quite satisfactorily so for the client!

Despite the emergence of narrative career counselling as a promising alternative, its relative nascence is problematic for its articulation in the field. Reid (2005) provided a useful summary of narrative career counselling by way of enumerating its possible limitations and potential benefits. A significant point articulated by Reid was that the approach may be difficult for beginner practitioners because of its ostensible lack of structured techniques and tangible products (e.g., psychometric inventories) typically associated with traditional approaches. Conversely Reid suggested that it suffers from the rejection of advanced practitioners who have been schooled in the orthodox
approach, because of its lack of association with logical-positivist psychological science. Unlike the traditional approach, which over the course of decades has accumulated a substantial body of evidence which is broadly indicative of its efficacy and effectiveness (e.g., Swanson, 1995; Swanson & Gore, 2000), constructivist, narrative career counselling has not yet accumulated a quantum of irrefutable evidence.

Epistemological differences aside, Reid’s (2005) critique is of fundamental importance. It would be disingenuous for the narrative school to use its repudiation of the logical-positivist paradigm as a veil for not engaging in its own rigorous evaluation upon its own epistemological terms; especially given the accession of qualitative research methods in counselling psychology (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). A failure by proponents of the narrative school to rigorously demonstrate its efficacy and effectiveness (cf. Chambless & Hollon, 1998) would likely attenuate the realisation of its aspiration for wider articulation in the field of counselling psychology. There has, nevertheless, been an important methodological advance in the form of a set of criteria for the rigorous development of constructivist, qualitative assessment procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) and these certainly are apropos of the narrative approach.

In summary, narrative career counselling is a personal, meaningful, emotional, action-oriented, approach to counselling in which client and counsellor collaborate. It eschews traditional models of counselling which have been based upon the expert power of the counsellor. Notwithstanding the claims and progress of the narrative approach to career counselling, there has been only limited development of the theory of narrative process and its relationship to identity and career, and additionally, the construction of narratives within the counselling experience. What is needed is theory that fully describes the how of personal narrative and its co-construction in career
counselling, and, moreover, theory that explicitly informs the evaluation, practice and the development of narrative counselling procedures. It is posited here that the theory of dialogical self offers such a framework.

Concluding Remarks

The research project presented here makes an attempt to contribute to the respective theoretical literatures pertaining to Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), 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. Towards these goals, the project proffers an integration of the theory of dialogical self with the two theoretical frameworks STF and Theory of Career Construction. With respect to the project’s applied outcomes, it will aim to demonstrate that the Theory Dialogical Self can be used to describe the process of career construction; and concomitantly be used to guide the development and utilisation of the career assessment and counselling process under investigation: My Career Chapter. In approaching these research goals, the project will investigate the experience of using My Career Chapter, from both the clients’ and the counsellors’ perspectives.
CHAPTER FOUR:

MY CAREER CHAPTER: A DIALOGICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Generally we strive to acquire one emotional stance, one viewpoint for all life…..But rather than making oneself uniform, we may find greater value for the enrichment of knowledge by listening to the soft voice of different life situations; each brings its own views with it. Thus we acknowledge and share the life and nature of many by not treating ourselves like rigid, invariable, single individuals (Nietzsche, 1994, pp. 256-257).

This chapter provides an overview of My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2006). A copy of the manuscript is presented in the final section of the Appendix (note that the copy is in MS Word format and that it appears differently when printed and saddle-stitch bound as a booklet). My Career Chapter is a qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure. The expression “career assessment and counselling procedure” is used deliberately because it implies the coalition of assessment and counselling. The two form one process in narrative career counselling. My Career Chapter is at once an assessment tool and a counselling process.

Theoretical Foundations

My Career Chapter draws upon the respective theoretical literatures pertaining to Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005), the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), and also upon the applied literature of constructivist, narrative career counselling (McMahon & Patton, 2006c). These have been described comprehensively in previous sections of the dissertation, and only summary statements are used in this chapter.
The STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), comprehensively abducts career from the orthodox, modernist conception and posits career as a multifarious process entailing the dynamic interaction of personal conditions (e.g., interests, values) through to social and political influences. My Career Chapter is founded upon the STF and provides a process by which an individual can comprehensively and holistically, conceptualise his or her career.

The theory of career construction posits career as an intrinsically personal project:

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 through Savickas’s conceptualisation that career is generated through conversations, that is becomes the focus of the dialogical self, which was defined 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).
Together converged, the three theories hold out a notion of career through which the individual progressively recreates him or herself through dialogical relations whilst moving across the multiple influences identified in the STF of career.

My Career Chapter’s content and administrative processes are consistent with the notions of a constructivist, narrative approach to career assessment and counselling, as described by Patton and McMahon (2006b). As such, the client and counsellor are considered to be in a collaborative working partnership toward co-construction of meaningful and emotionally bound career-related autobiography. The procedure is embedded in counselling that assumes the primacy of reflecting on story and the very words used by the client to construct his or her career identity; and this is mirrored in the dialogue of the client and counsellor as they work through the reading and interpretation of the autobiographical manuscript. Constructions and deconstructions of knowledge are shaped through co-constructed dialogue between the career counsellor and the client (cf. Penn & Frankfurt, 1994; Strong, 2003). As such, the reading of the career story is replicated in vivo with a career counsellor, and another dialogical exchange ensues.

Thus, with respect to dialogical self, My Career Chapter exemplifies the facilitated construction of a career story from different I-positions as internal and internal career influences; from different I-positions across time; and from the real conversations between counsellor and client. Ultimately, My Career Chapter aims to facilitate a process that generates a holistic understanding of the client’s career.

Upon conception of the core idea 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 process. Construction was also guided by a desire not to replicate alternative methods that were derived from Systems Theory Framework or used a visual and spatial format (e.g. Adams, 2003; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005); nor other narrative methods that facilitated clients’ constructions of personal stories (e.g. Brott, 2001; Cochran, 1997; Savickas, 2002, 2005); and assessment processes used for the Theory of Dialogical Self (i.e., Self-Confrontation Method, Personal Position Repertoire, Personality Web). My Career Chapter ultimately represents a practitioner’s attempt pragmatically to integrate the theory of dialogical self with the two theoretical frameworks STF and career construction.

**Administrative Procedure**

There is convincing evidence that the act of writing about oneself and personal issues has positive benefits upon wellbeing (Cameron & Nicholls, 1998). Cochran (1997) and Brott (2001, 2004, 2005) described a range of techniques or topics for enriching the interview process or empowering narration in career counselling (e.g., life line, life chapters, success experiences, family constellations, role models, early recollections, life-role circles). These techniques have been primarily written or spoken in modality. Recent work has, nevertheless, highlighted visual-spatial avenues of narrative career counselling; and these include: career system diagrams (Miller, 2004); text-boxes connected to pictures, personal coat-of-arms (Gibson, 2000, 2003); collage of meaningful pictures (Adams, 2003); mind-maps (Pollitt, 2003); career-o-gram (Thorngren & Feit, 2001); and life-role circles (Brown & Brooks, 1991). Life-lines (Goldman, 1992), life chapters (Cochran, 1997), and the storied approach to career counselling (Brott, 2001, 2004, 2005) epitomise the notion of an individual talking and writing about his or her self and their career life in order to generate some meaning related to career. Brott centres the process on story co-construction, deconstruction and
construction. Through these processes, the client explores the meanings and interconnectedness of life roles (e.g., family, leisure).

McIlveen and others (2003) adapted the storied approach (Brott, 2001) by developing a semi-structured interview based around the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton & McMahon, 1999), which was later entitled the Career Systems Interview. Their method structured the interview conversation around the myriad variables of careerlife identified in the STF. Furthermore, they found that the method was efficacious in stimulating career attributions and intentions toward self-exploration, when compared against a “standard” psychological assessment interview.

The Career Systems Interview (McIlveen et al., 2003) was to be advanced by developing a written means of exploring an individual’s career system through his or her own narrative elaboration. Consistent with Reid’s (2005) comments that some clients may need assistance in expressing their story, a pilot version of My Career Chapter was developed for clients who were tentative in counselling, preferred writing as opposed to or in addition to speaking or who could not attend a personal appointment and preferred to work by telephone and correspondence (i.e., adult distance education students). The intention was to facilitate, through the use of writing, a client’s thinking about his or her career issues through a matrix of variables identified in the STF. It was reasoned that providing a guide to a writing process would encourage the client to consider comprehensively his or her career as an entire system of career influences, and distinct from writing about a narrower topic (e.g., recollections of success). My Career Chapter is, therefore, the parallel form—written version—of the Career Systems Interview.

My Career Chapter was designed for adult clients with a strong grasp of English (i.e., university students and adults who were clients of a university counselling
Procedurally, My Career Chapter requires the client to complete an autobiography using a structured set of processes that guide 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. The client works through a series of steps, beginning with general career-related questions to orient him or her to the task. He or she will then consider “the big picture” of career by viewing and reflecting upon a diagram depicting the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). The client then considers how each of the influences described in the STF are compatible or incompatible for him or herself. These two steps commence the process of decentring career; or leading the person to consider that career is a broad and deeply personal and lifelong experience, much more than the composition of their interests, skills and abilities.

Next, the client writes about his or her career by completing part-sentences associated with each of the influences of the STF—a process akin to the sentence-completion procedure established by Loevinger (1985). Each sentence of the influences has a past, present, and future stem; along with a rating of how strong the influence is and how the client feels in relation to it. The rating processes were similar to those included in the *Self-confrontation Method* (Hermans, Fiddelaers, de Groot, & Nauta, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995), which has been the foundational assessment procedure associated with the theory of dialogical self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Upon completing the sentence-completion task, which is the bulk of the autobiography, the client must submit the draft to an editor for review. The editor is the client him or herself, five years younger. The client must read the manuscript as if they were the younger self and then write editorial comments to the older self. Upon receiving editorial comments, the older (current) self writes back to the editor with a
summary of the career story and future. This process was founded upon a similar procedure used to generate dialogical transactions with oneself (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The client is provided with additional space to write comments and reflections before returning to the next counselling session, at which the chapter of his or her career is discussed after being spoken out loud and heard by the author in a co-constructive interpretative process. The reading-back and interpretation process is treated like any other career counselling session in which assessment data are interpreted idiographically and integrated into the foregoing counselling.

*Alignment with Recommendations for Qualitative Procedures*

Notwithstanding their potential utility for counsellors and clients, constructivist qualitative methods need to be brought under the gaze of rigorous research and evaluation—regardless of epistemological differences. However, there have been relatively few formal guidelines upon which to design, use and evaluate qualitative career counselling and assessment procedures (Goldman, 1992; McMahon & Patton, 2002b; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). For example, explicit guidelines for the development and application of qualitative career assessment procedures do not appear within the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association. American Psychological Association. National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999). Those standards have been used extensively to guide critical evaluations of assessment tools. Without explicit standards for qualitative procedures, the evaluation of qualitative career assessment procedures would continue to be awkwardly based upon the traditional systems appropriate for quantitative psychometric methods, and they would continue, ipso facto, to fail under most criteria.
Until appropriate international standards for qualitative procedures are developed, the applied researcher and practitioner must be guided by extant literature.

My Career Chapter was conceptually grounded in the standards recommended for the development of qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). These standards include:

1. Ground the assessment process in theory.
2. Test the career assessment process.
3. Ensure that the process can be completed in a reasonable time frame.
4. Design a process that fosters holism.
5. Write instructions for the client.
6. Write readable and easily understood instructions.
7. Sequence logical, simple, small achievable steps.
8. Provide a focused and flexible process.
9. Encourage co-operative involvement of counsellor and client.
10. Include a debriefing process (pp. 197-200).

The extent to which My Career Chapter aligns with these recommendations is a crucial feature of this research project.

*Grounded in Theory.* My Career Chapter extensively relates to the Theory of Dialogical Self and represents another operationalisation of the Systems Theory Framework. With respect to dialogical self, My Career Chapter engenders a process through which the client can dialogically engage with him or herself (and the counsellor) across space and time and produce a chronotope. It is also a means of generating career-related life themes apropos of the Theory of Career Construction.

*Test the Process.* As this research project has not yet been completed, this criterion cannot be properly satisfied at this stage.
Reasonable Time Frame. The process should involve a first interview of approximately one hour, in which client and counsellor would work through a process such as the Career Systems Interview (McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003). The writing process is completely determined by the individual, but it should take at least 90 minutes. The follow-up interview, in which the text is read and interpreted and the process of chronotope conversation is completed, should not take longer than a standard session hour. The procedure may be written in stages according to the user’s individual circumstances.

Holism. The process is broad in its coverage of a client’s systems of influences and involves extensive talking and going over of text. There is ample scope for exploration beyond individual influences about which the client writes. Moreover, the process engenders the expression and understanding of emotion; and by its very nature of systems thinking, broadly allows for the engagement of the world outside of the client’s person (e.g., family, friends).

Instructions for the Client. The instructions are written in casually spoken, adult language. Clients’ ownership of the instructions is facilitated by use of the pronoun “you” and the possessive “your”.

Comprehensible Instructions. Explicit written instructions are included in the body of My Career Chapter and spoken instructions are given prior to its administration. The instructions for My Career Chapter are written in simple language, appropriate for adult readers; it is not written for adolescents.

Logical, Simple, Small, Achievable Steps. The process allows the client to stop at any stage to rest or regather. Each Influence is bordered by clear lines on the page, which would indicate to the client that there is a beginning and end to each. A graphic
of the STF is presented at the beginning, along with a rationale of how each Influence fits within the dynamic system of the person’s life (as represented graphically).

*Focused and Flexible.* The instructions bring the client’s attention to the writing and speaking work that is to be done. The instructions, supporting rationale, and items reflect the focus upon career and meaning. The process is flexible in that clients can choose not to write particular items; they can take additional time to write items; they can re-write items upon consideration or conversations that change their potency or meaning; and they can add their own additional information where needed.

*Co-operative Involvement.* The whole process is co-operative as it favours a co-constructive endeavour. The client and counsellor discuss the written responses throughout with the intention of constructing new meaning that is understood by both.

*Debriefing.* The process of debriefing is inherent in the process of the follow-up interview; involving an exploration of how the client is currently situated with respect to the process of assessment and counselling and how he or she sees it progressing. This counselling also involves an exploration of the phenomenal experience of actually doing the writing; which would allow for the ventilation of untoward reactions.

*Summary*

My Career Chapter is a new career assessment and counselling procedure. Its putative alignment with constructivism and the narrative approach to career is yet to be explicated and proved. The subsequent chapters report on the investigation of the theoretical and practical features of My Career Chapter through the studies of this research project.
CHAPTER FIVE:

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A scholar’s personal philosophy of science will directly influence his or her selection of research paradigm to guide the research (Ponterotto, 2002).

The Parenthetic Considerations (presented in Appendix A) provide an important foundation for the research methods adapted for this research project. Epistemological and ontological issues presented in that consideration alluded to the value of alternative approaches to psychological science that are not necessarily constrained to the mechanical, formist, and organic root metaphors, so often associated with the most predominant approach of positivist psychological science. The contextualist root metaphor readily presents opportunities for constructivisms and qualitative research methods that attempt to elucidate concomitant theories. With My Career Chapter as a working example of narrative career assessment and counselling, this research project has process as its focus. This chapter, which precedes the studies proper, commences with an overview of the issues of outcome and process research in vocational psychology. A discussion of the philosophical basis of the research methodology of this research project is then presented.

My Career Chapter exemplifies narrative career counselling which entails written work and individualised interpretation and feedback; however, as a new procedure there are specific questions to be addressed:

1. How was My Career Chapter developed?
2. How does it manifest and inform theory—pure and applied?
3. How do client-users experience My Career Chapter?
4. How do counsellor-users experience My Career Chapter?

Through the study of My Career Chapter as a working model, this research project broadly sets out to explore the process of narrative career counselling. Furthermore, it aims to consider the development of a model of dialogical career counselling and, specifically, it aims to comprehensively describe the career counselling and assessment process in question, and investigate how the operation of it was experienced by the counsellor and the client.

Issues of Paradigm

There is a diverse range of research paradigms available for psychological science and they have come under scrutiny from within and among one another. The arguments for the accession of new paradigms and concomitant qualitative research methods for the study of psychology and counselling have been ably and extensively put by others (e.g. Borgen, 1992, 1995; Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003; Dallos & Vetere, 2005; Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992; Kidd, 2002; McLeod, 1996; Morrow, 2005, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Patton & Jackson, 1991; Swanson, 1995; Willig, 2001), and need no rationale to supervene here. For example, qualitative research for counselling psychology was covered in a special issue of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (2005) and *The Counseling Psychologist* (1994, 2007). As for vocational psychology, a special issue of the *Journal of Career Assessment* (2005) gave substantial treatment to qualitative research and assessment within the field of career development. This was preceded by an earlier review of qualitative research in organisational and vocational psychology through 1979–1999 (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999) and the arguments of other prominent scholars who asserted that a variety of research paradigms were needed to advance vocational psychology (e.g. Betz, 2001; Blustein, 2001; Fouad, 2001; Walsh, 2001). The advent of the special issues in
these prestigious scientific journals is exemplification of the so-called postmodern turn in psychology and an accession of other paradigms—in other words, qualitative research has been “legitimated” (Lyotard, 1979/1984).

The paradigms for counselling psychology research may be conveniently conceptualised as: positivism; postpositivism; constructivism or interpretivism; and critical theory or postmodernism; and each can be differentiated across ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure, and method (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Ponterotto, 2002, 2005).

With respect to their ontology, positivists seek a true and knowable universe, whereas postpositivists accept that this gold standard is unattainable, and intellectually settle on an attenuated version of truth replete with error. Constructivists posit that there are multiple constructed realities dependent upon recursive relationships between perception and context. Critical theorists posit a negotiable reality that is mediated by power dynamics embedded in language, culture and history. Their respective epistemologies range from objectivity to subjectivity. The knower and the known are separate according to the positivists, whereas the constructivists admit to a transactional relationship between the two, and the critical theorists emphasise the power of the researcher to influence the dialogue between the two. With respect to axiology, therefore, the values of the researcher inherently drive critical research with a desired social and political outcome: whereas the constructivists acknowledge and attempt to contain their values and their potential influence upon the research endeavour, the positivists utterly eschew values concordant with their standard of objectivity. The languages of their respective sciences differ; with the positivists speaking and writing
without emotion and involvement and speaking for the subject; through to the engaged
dialogue and first-person account of the critical theorist.

At their polar ends, positivists and critical theorists oppose one another across
ontology, epistemology, axiology, and rhetorical discourse. However, constructivists
and postpositivists can sit (albeit uncomfortably) somewhere in the middle of the two
poles and, because of the ontological and epistemological compromises made by both,
some of their methods could be claimed by either; say for example, consensual
qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005). For an intellectual context for this assertion,
consider that Michell (2004) argued that qualitative methods could be subsumed by
positivist science and Ponterotto (2005) suggested that qualitative methods are
“empirical” because “they involve collection, analysis, and interpretation of
observations or data” (p. 128). Ponterotto carefully indicated that data connotes
different meanings in quantitative and qualitative research, but nevertheless retained the
term.

A mixed-method approach to qualitative research has received considerable
support (Kelle, 2006; Mason, 2006). In relation to this approach, the notion of
pragmatism (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) was posited as a paradigm of compromise
between postpositivism and constructivism. Pragmatism holds that both qualitative and
quantitative methods can be used in combination to complement each other and to
investigate where the other cannot go. This mixed method approach has been touted as
useful for counselling research (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005),
yet some scholars emphasise the need to carefully remain true to the paradigmatic
assumptions of whichever quantitative and qualitative methods are used, so as to
prevent inappropriate claims of research outcome (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007).
There are several methods for empirically gathering data for qualitative research in counselling psychology; these include, for example, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, stimulated recall techniques, projective techniques, documentary sources, participant observation, physical data, electronic data, and inquiry groups (McLeod, 1996; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Kwong Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Some of these methods would be equally at home in the postpositivist and constructivist camps. Despite their commonalities, there is considerable philosophical and scientific tension between the two paradigms of postpositivism and constructivism. This tension has played out in the signs of research rigour, or credibility, and the divide between nomothetic and idiographic methods.

Indicators of Goodness for Qualitative Research

Without labouring the historical point, issues of quality have been a source of contention between qualitative and quantitative researchers who apply differing standards according to their respective ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Just as the positivist tradition holds up indicators of quality for its scientific data collection and research methods—which are so frequently presented in countless texts on research methods for psychology—criteria for goodness and trustworthiness in qualitative research in psychology have also been established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Mertens, 1998; Parker, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Willig, 2001) and applied to counselling psychology (Morrow, 2005, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Morrow suggested that there were two sets of criteria appropriate for counselling psychology research: transcendent and paradigm-specific. Morrow applied these across the three paradigms (i.e., postpositivist, constructivist, and critical).

Transcendent Criteria. These criteria were set for all three paradigms by Morrow (2005) and entailed: social validity; subjectivity and reflexivity; adequacy of
data; and adequacy of interpretation. Transcendent criteria pertain to the qualitative research endeavour generally and, given the preceding text, do not require elaboration here.

**Paradigm-specific Criteria.** The paradigm-specific criteria for postpositivism included: credibility (which parallels internal validity in quantitative research); transferability (which parallels external validity); dependability (which parallels reliability); and confirmability (parallel to objectivity). Lincoln and Guba (1985) promulgated techniques by which credibility could be established, and these include prolonged engagement and persistent observation and the use of multiple data sources (i.e. triangulation). They recommended peer debriefing with a disinterested reviewer and also returning reports to the participants for their review and check on conclusions. Reviewing data and conclusions in light of a negative or contradictory case was also recommended. Another checking mechanism was to reserve a portion of raw data and return to it as a point of reference, using external reviewers for critique. Transferability can be attained through thick description of the data. In addition to the aforementioned processes, dependability could be approached through the use of overlapping methods, and replication. Audit process and outcomes were also advocated as a means to secure dependability and confirmability, respectively. The researcher’s completion of a reflective journal was also seen as an audit process and oversight process. While not all of these processes may be operationalised in one study, they are indicative of the extraordinary inquiring depth to which qualitative research lends itself; and gainsay suggestions that qualitative research is not comprehensive (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992).

Although the parallel standards of research trustworthiness are well founded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the notion does not come without criticism which asserts that
the standards of quantitative research may not be appropriate for all forms of qualitative research and cannot simply be applied in a parallel fashion (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000). This criticism is particularly apt for constructivism/interpretivism and ideological paradigms because their epistemologies and ontology are different from postpositivist research—the paradigm for which the standards are most valuable. In historical fairness to Lincoln and Guba, the additional criteria for other paradigms had not yet emerged in the research traditions and literature at the time of publication of their own seminal work Naturalistic Inquiry.

The specific criteria for constructivist/interpretivist paradigm for counselling research include fairness, authenticity, and meaning (Mertens, 1998; Morrow, 2005). The notion of fairness implies that a variety of constructions are to be solicited and represented within the research, regardless of whether they conflict with one another. The components of authenticity were described by Morrow (2005):

In ontological authenticity, participants’ individual constructions are improved, matured, expanded and elaborated. Educative authenticity requires those participants’ understandings of and appreciation for the constructions of others be enhanced. Catalytic authenticity speaks to the extent to which action is stimulated (pp. 252-253).

Morrow emphasised the importance of contextualised meaning through deep understanding (verstehen) and mutual, interdependent co-construction of meaning between participant and researcher. To further the understanding of meaning, Morrow added that constructivist research should be considered with respect to its situational context and surrounding culture. Situational context pertains to the immediate influences within the participant and research relationship and environment; and how these impact upon the research, whereas culture refers to the broader influences. These
analyses are apropos of Patton and McMahon’s (1999) conceptualisation of the two systems of the counsellor and client interacting with one another toward co-constructed experience. Furthermore, Morrow suggested that rapport between counsellor and participant be considered with respect to boundaries.

Morrow’s (2005) paradigm-specific criteria for critical-ideological paradigm included those applied to constructivism and *consequential validity* and *transgressive validity*. Research that is consequential stimulates socio-political change and transgressive research incites critical discourse. Morrow suggested that research dependent upon these criteria would probably draw in those from other paradigms and that they were better placed as a critical, contextual heuristic.

*Nomothetic and Idiographic methods*  

Within the canon of psychological science there has been a distinction between nomothetic and idiographic methods—with the nomothetic being held up as the epistemic gold standard and the idiographic as the inferior. A champion of idiographic methods for the study of personality was Gordon Allport (Runyan, 1983); moreover, Allport strongly advocated for the use of both systems. Runyan suggested that the goal of personality psychology—and his suggestion applies broadly—was to discover (a) what is true to all human beings, (b) what is true of groups of human beings, and (c) what is true of individual human beings (pp. 416-417). Making generalisations within and across these domains would require more than one method of research. Runyan nevertheless reported that research based upon idiographic methods had not been equally received as legitimate forms of method for psychological science. Runyan (1983) enumerated the classical criticisms of idiographic science and then cogently dismantled them, or at least vitiated their purchase on epistemological absolutism.
It is worth elaborating the predominant—if not hackneyed—criticism of the usefulness of idiographic research with respect to generating knowledge. A goal of psychological science is to discover laws, inducted from studies of “representative” samples which could, because of their representative characteristics, attenuate the error variance associated with individual cases whose characteristics do not regress to the mean. Those laws, inducted from the aggregate, can then be applied to the individual; who would be generically represented by their inclusion—real or extrapolated—in the sample upon which the law was founded. Following this principle, a criticism of idiography, pronounced by adherents of nomothetic schooling, goes something like this: because idiographic research is based upon the individual, the data and hypotheses cannot be generalised to the larger population, and it consequently offers little for the formation of universal laws of behaviour. This is a true argument. However, the obverse also holds; that is, what holds for the aggregate cannot readily be generalised to a particular individual—the source of error variance. Put another way, a general law is a law of the average and the nomothetically derived “average person” is a theoretical construct, not flesh and bone. This raises an important question for career counselling: should practices for the living be based upon the laws of the imaginary? Essentially the argument of generalisability cuts both ways and an absolutist dichotomy is unhelpful to the endeavour of research.

Borgen (1992, 1995) challenged the researchers of vocational psychology by arguing against paradigmatic absolutism. He suggested that pluralism was an acceptable pathway(s) for vocational psychology and recommended the fair admission of knowledge derived from both nomothetic and idiographic methods. In combining quantitative and qualitative knowledges, he cleverly stated that “we can use our numbers to draw pictures” (1995, p. 436). Borgen portended the emergence of a new
form of research and practice in proclaiming *narrative assessment* as one way forward in combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches.

**Summary**

Whilst quantitative methods are not necessarily anathema to constructivist and social constructionist theorising (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and qualitative methods may not necessarily contradict realist psychological science (Michell, 2004), quantitative methods do present inherent limitations which may be ameliorated by qualitative methods. The legitimacy of idiographic methods for the study of individuals (Savickas, 2005) and the enrichment of vocational psychology and the practices of career counselling through both idiographic and nomothetic methods (e.g., narrative assessment) (Runyan, 1983) establishes the epistemological and ontological rationale for the place of meaning, metaphor, narrative, story and themes in the study of career and the counselling of the individual (e.g., Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005; Bujold, 2004).

Put broadly, qualitative research should account for the experience of a person (Ponterotto, 2005); its quality is thus established on how it achieves that goal. This research addresses the experience of the counsellor-user and client-user in the application of My Career Chapter, and it should be judged according to how those experiences have been captured and authentically represented.

**Reporting the Studies**

With the exception of Study 5, which entailed a quasi-experimental design, all of the studies are primarily qualitative in their foundational epistemology and method. The reporting of qualitative research is, in itself, a topic of some diversity. As for the psychological literature, there has been development in establishing standards by which
qualitative research reports may written (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007) and be judged, including the following from Willig (2001):

1. Owning one’s perspective.
2. Situating the sample.
3. Grounding in examples.
4. Providing credibility checks.
5. Coherence in analysis and interpretation.
6. Accomplishing general versus specific research tasks.
7. Resonating with readers (pp. 143-144).

Yet, despite the presence of recommendations for conducting and reporting qualitative research, there is evidence that researchers have not consistently adhered to the ideals of qualitative research paradigms (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007). In response to such criticism, the qualitative studies of this research project were written using the reporting format for qualitative research recommended by Morrow (2005) in the special issue of the Journal of Counseling Psychology (which is consistent with the scientific writing style of the American Psychological Society). The overall structure of the received scientific report in APA format was retained with the sections, Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion. However, Morrow suggested different a format in each of the sections which contrast to the traditional quantitative model of reporting.

Morrow (2005) recommended that the Introduction of a study be similar to the received model, but that additional information be provided to clarify the philosophical underpinnings of the research. This requires definite explication in the Method section under a sub-heading of Philosophical assumptions or Paradigm. Other sub-headings include description of the qualitative Research design and a Researcher-as-instrument statement in which the rationale and reflexive processes of the research are outlined. A
sub-section of Participants is included, with an emphasis on participant selection and researcher roles and relationships. The sub-section Sources of data outlines how data were collected (e.g., interview, focus group) and represents a combined form of the traditional Instruments and Procedures sections. The Method section finally includes Data analysis (rather than it being positioned in the Results section). This subsection also deals with data adequacy and trustworthiness. The Results section contains the outcomes of the data analyses. The Discussion section is similar to the traditional model. Morrow emphasised, however, that the usual limitations of the research statement should not be used as an apology for qualitative research, with allusions to epistemological inferiority: for example, talking down research conclusions due to the relatively small sample sizes associated with qualitative research.
CHAPTER SIX:
THE DEVELOPER’S EXPERIENCE

Here we touch the difference between the enthusiasm of the developing scientist who follows his/her immediate impulses and the reflective thinker who critically examines his/her own development as part of a life-review. Maybe, the young scientist needs an optimal amount of blindness in order to create favourable conditions for possible innovations (Hermans, 2006a, p. 23).

Rather than overview the scientific theory and literature underpinning My Career Chapter and then merely present it as if it appeared without any inherently personal process, it is important to describe the applied research and discovery process of the production of My Career Chapter as a piece of psychological, career development technology. Hence, this chapter comprises the reports of the reflective scientific-practice studies of this research project. They are germane to the entire research project and entail a partial account of the construction and reformulation of My Career Chapter. They are critical, reflexive accounts of the experience of developing My Career Chapter. But, how does one study the reflective practice of a scientist-practitioner?

Given the primacy of self in qualitative research (Morrow, 2005; Yeh & Inman, 2007), in this dimension of the research project it is appropriate to pause and consider how I approach the notion of reflexivity. Consider this excerpt:

Self-reflexivity, or the reflexive function of the mind, needs to be carefully distinguished from the more usual understanding of self-reflection. Self-reflection connotes a cognitive process in which one thinks about oneself with some distance, as if from the outside, that is, as if examining oneself as an object...
of thought. The way I use self-reflexivity here, by way of contrast, includes the
dialectical process of experiencing oneself as a subject as well as of reflecting on
oneself as an object (Aron, 2000, p. 668).

Here Aron is attempting to delineate between an examination of an extensively
conscious and emotional sense of self in action, against an objectified, perhaps two-
dimensional, consideration of the Cartesian self as an entity in action somehow “over
there”, not genuinely felt, and disembodied. Whilst Aron’s (2000) conceptualisation of
self-reflexivity stems from psychodynamic psychology, it is no less relevant to
constructivist psychology.

In the vein of self-reflexivity, Study 1 is a personal, autoethnographic account of
the invention of My Career Chapter. Study 2 describes the use of myself as an
autoethnographic case study in the application of My Career Chapter. These Studies
report on a dimension of the critical thinking and reflective practice that was used to
develop and refine My Career Chapter and formulate the questions of the research
project. They are extensive “field notes” of the entire doctoral research project and
serve as case study examples of a genuine attempt to manifest the notion of a scientist-
practitioner at work, through the engagement in the process of reflexive research
(Etherington, 2004; Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2005) and reflexive counselling
practice (Aron, 2000; Collin, 1996b; Etherington, 2004), by using writing (Bleakley,
2000) as the medium of reflection. Prior to entering into the studies, at this juncture the
reader may consider turning to the Parenthetic Considerations in Appendix A to gain a
full appreciation of the intellectual background of the developer’s experience.
Study 1:

The Creation of My Career Chapter

As a modern human science, psychology rapidly developed a panoply of scientific theories, scientific methods, experimental designs, sophisticated statistical methods, and scholarly journals that legitimised its position amongst the “real sciences”. Not only is the discipline a science on its own terms, its predominant professional practitioners—psychologists—are, or are at least exhorted to be, applied scientists; as they are trained to be scientist-practitioners or scientifically-minded practitioners who implement evidence-based interventions (Belar & Perry, 1992; Kaslow, 2004; O'Gorman, 2001; Peterson, 2003). The scientist-practitioner mantle resounds in relating to vocational psychologists and career counsellors as “applied behavioural scientists” (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, p. 49). Thus endowed, career guidance professionals have been reified as eclectic purveyors of scientifically proven, evidence-based techniques.

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 logical, technical, and objective means; moreover, 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 broader conditions that influenced the construction of a quantitative psychometric or qualitative career assessment procedure. Surely it is axiomatic that the kernel of significant career assessment and counselling procedures
did not simply “emerge from the literature”. This study\(^2\) describes the inherently personal process of undertaking the scientific practice of vocational psychology.

The development of assessment procedures for constructivist career counselling (McMahon & Patton, 2006c) can involve the personal creativity of the practitioner (McMahon & Patton, 2002b; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003), as he or she produces “homemade assessment methods” (Goldman, 1992, p. 618). The development of a qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure which is intrinsic to this research, namely My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2006), 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 scientist-practitioner—featured in the latter stages of development, in which the version was refined according to theoretical tenets and extant assessment processes that were founded 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. There were, nevertheless, key scientific works that stimulated surges of creative thinking; but only a summary of the theories and the procedure itself are presented here.

The Current Study

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

\(^2\) This study was published as: McIlveen, P. (2007). The genuine scientist-practitioner in vocational psychology: An autoethnography. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 4*(4), 295-311
so, this reflexive study also aims to satisfy the recommendation by McMahon and Patton (2006b) that career counsellors connect with their own career stories in order to coalesce theory and practice.

Method

Assumptions

The paradigm through which this study is reported is constructivist in ontology and epistemology, however, it tends toward a critical-ideological stance in its axiology, rhetorical structure, and method (Ponterotto, 2002, 2005). With respect to its constructivist ontology and epistemology, I personally hold that my readings of the literature thus far, and my own unique history, experiences and existence, have underpinned the creation of My Career Chapter. With respect to the shift toward a critical axiology, the Parenthetic Consideration, *Traffic Police for the Invisible Hand* (in Appendix A), presents an argument that stems from this axiology and there is no need to represent that argument here; suffice to say however, that my movement toward constructivism and the apparent abandonment of positivist practices as a psychologist were instrumental in these actions of creation.

Research Design

This study reports an iterative, cyclical process of creation and 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; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Roth, 2005a; Spry, 2001; Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003). Autoethnography falls within the ambit of ethnography (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005) and relates readily to interpretive biography. 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).

Although other research-oriented disciplines such as education (c.f., Roth, 2005b) and sociology (Anderson, 2006) make use of autoethnography, it has not been a widely used research method within psychology. Traditional positivist psychologies would quite legitimately reject it as a process toward knowledge, according to their epistemological and ontological assumptions and axiology. At the time of writing this Study, it certainly had no presence within the extant literature of career development. Constructivist and critical-ideological psychology paradigms cannot reject the method however, as it represents a constructivist and critical form of the N = 1 case study, albeit in a rather unusual form because the case just happens to be the researcher.

Nevertheless, this method of individual inspection and introspection is not inconsistent with the traditions of psychology, which is ironically replete with examples of similar methods under different names: take for example the notion of self-analysis according to the psychodynamic traditions of qualitative research (Kvale, 2003).

Within the literature of psychological research methods, autoethnography can be a form of narrative analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2006), and would fall in the gamut of narratology as described by Hoshmand (2005), who posited three types of narrative research:

1. A descriptive report of a privately constructed self-account in its original form.
2. A recounting of a dialogically generated narrative or set of narratives in a story form.

3. A storied account of an experience constructed from interviews, written reports, observations, and artefacts (p. 181).

Ethnography takes interest in what people do, what people know and how they describe their worlds, and the things that people 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. I am at once a member of the group “scientist-practitioner” psychologist and a member of sub-set groupings vocational psychologist, career counsellor, who uses qualitative assessment and counselling methods. I used autoethnography as method for this study to reflexively, critically investigate and reveal my own conditions as researcher and practitioner, intrinsic interests and biases associated with the development of My Career Chapter, and ultimately the personal and professional conditions surrounding its development. Hoshmand (2005) cited narrative studies of psychologists in which similar reflective purposes and processes were of interest. At the level of final analysis, I presented a narrative of the construction of My Career Chapter as an (auto) ethnographic example of what members of a particular grouping make and do in their practices.

*Researcher-as-Instrument Statement*

The process of autoethnography did not come without anxiety, as it involves challenge to the orthodoxy of research writing (Vickers, 2002) and considerable risk through personal exposure—a personal phenomenon which is completely consistent with the method (Ellis, 1999; Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003). To pursue that agenda of honest exposure, 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.

1. How do you see the goals of career counselling? What are your key goals
   and values for career counselling? What do you want to have happen for
   your career client?

2. 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?

3. How might your worldview of career counselling limit some of your clients?
   What types of groups do you need to learn more about? What types of
   values and behaviours might be difficult for you as a career counsellor?

4. What additional questions would you want to ask of yourself and of the
   others in the workshop? (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 researcher-as-instrument and in the sub-section
Autobiographical Critical Self-Awareness.

In accordance with Watson’s and Morrow’s explicit requirement of openness,
my personalisation of the philosophical and paradigmatic assumptions of this research
project has been presented openly in the Parenthetic Considerations (presented in
Appendix A) and does not need detailed reiteration here. In summary: I, as an author of
my myriad Me states, is replete with biases. My biases are notably evident in my
disdain for psychological scientists and psychologists who will not, or cannot,
understand nor admit alternative ways of knowing. This is expressed almost certainly as a form of well sublimated, rationalised rage and has been intellectualised through the writing of the initial sections of the dissertation that are presented in the Parenthetic Considerations as *Traffic Police for the Invisible Hand*—published later under a different title (McIlveen & Patton, 2006).

**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 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., vocational psychologist, scientist-practitioner, career counsellor) crossed over various “personal” Me states (e.g., rural kid from a lower 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); and these included my doctoral supervisor, colleagues, and friends, who would critically listen to my recollections and ideas. Friends played an important role in the research process as they were a source for historical corroboration and authenticity (Tillmann-Healy, 2003).

**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 sources included (a) scientific literature; (b) English literature, philosophy and music; (c) conversations and emails; (d) phenomenological experiences; and (e) artefacts from my past, including documents from my initial training program for career counselling.

**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; Morrow & Smith, 2000) and critical, reflexive career development practice (Watson, 2006). With respect to 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 (e.g., McIlveen, 2007a; McIlveen & Patton, 2006) and my phenomenological experiencing of the actual construction process.

The emotive recollections and record (as a 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 offer 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 generalisability. 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, to record and text as representation, and to engage the human field of my own social construction; rather than to ensure generalisability.

Results

The results are organised and presented narratively across a number of significant themes that dynamically relate to the conditions that contributed to the conception of My Career Chapter. The results commence with the context of development: the worksite for which My Career Chapter was developed. A synthesis narrative of my own autobiographical critical self-awareness then follows and provides the broader story from which My Career Chapter emerged. Specific themes from
sources of data are presented to enhance the narrative. The results culminate in a summary of the cycling through theory, self and practice and reflect a profoundly personal history of transit between two socio-economic worlds.

*Necessity—the Mother of Invention*

As a practitioner, I had been applying the Systems Theory Framework (STF) for several years prior to commencing this research project; and the book by Patton and McMahon (1999) featured regularly in my professional work and supervision of junior psychologists taking an internship within my department (McIlveen, 2004). Evidence of my intellectual intimacy with STF was my development of the Career Systems Interview (McIlveen, 2003; McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003) as an initial assessment process for the purpose of career counselling. The decision to create something like My Career Chapter was initially founded upon a decision to develop a print-based alternative to the Career Systems Interview—one which was based upon STF and that could be used for clients who were not able to attend the usual face-to-face career counselling sessions in which that interview was conducted.

The context of that managerial decision to create a print version of the Career Systems Interview was that the Careers Service of the University of Southern Queensland had to make provisions for its considerable population of distance-education students—approximately 75% of its entire student population. Furthermore, the natural exigencies of cost-centre budgets meant that home-grown procedures would offer considerable cost savings for the department. It was anticipated that a print version could be mailed or emailed to clients and then followed up by a telephone interview. The intention was to create a written product that was founded upon constructivisms and the STF, and that would be amenable to use within the conceptual ambit of narrative career counselling.
Autobiographical Critical Self-awareness

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 high school. I always experienced being an outsider in that 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 riven by class differences and imbued with the deplorable distinctions of religious denominations—of course it did not help that I had publicly abandoned my Christian faith, much to the chagrin of the 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; a queer sort of Fabianism that 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 the overcoming of the despicable characteristics of the school
community, was being elected to the student council; again, much to the horror of the
school hierarchy.

A refinement of my strategies of overcoming the inherent disadvantages of my
socio-economic class was to deliberately learn how to speak a different dialect;
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. This was an horrific process with no mentor to guide me on the crucial
subtleties (e.g., the most appropriate moments to clap).

I can now speak both dialects of the Australian rural working class and the
metropolitan middle-class with utter confidence; my social self changes according to
context. 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 is equally dismissive of my social status and likes
to bring me “down a peg or two”; in a playful laconic Australian 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 program 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 speciality was clinical psychology and I had only a basic grasp of vocational psychology. Inspection of assessment papers from those early years of engagement in the profession revealed emerging themes that would later coalesce as constructivist practices. This evolution was a crucial pre-condition for the entry into narrative practices. Sentences from a different 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, 1999) and broader cultural and economic influences.

There remains, nevertheless, a caveat to all of this class-jumping through discourse: on 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 (1977, 1980a, 1994). 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.
Having worked as a roustabout as a young man, I later moved onto 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 was 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 individual construction within the context of the individual. In addition, it is a value-laden endeavour in the sense that I aim to assist an individual to understand the discursive existence and the concomitant discursive limitations. This aim speaks to a value of liberation within context. I want my clients to build their own worlds, and selectively to choose how they construct and re-construct their history, present, and future worlds. 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, Cameron,
McLachlan, & Gunn, 2005; McIlveen, Everton, & Clarke, 2005; McIlveen, Ford, & Everton, 2005) and concern that the individual will not be forgotten in the broader industry of career development (McIlveen, 2007a; 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, typically in the form of self-limiting statements. One which rings loudly in my ears and reminds me of my commitment to social justice and the power of dialogue is the statement by an Aboriginal woman who said, in response to my encouragement for her 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 echoes my own personal experience of class and my desires to break free by speaking myself into another being.

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 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* from the Sound of Music (Wise, 1965)—“Me, a name, I call myself”—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 Jamesian *me* and the *I*. This quirky coincidence further emboldened my commitment to the 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, *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, I would like to consider a study in which an individual writes My Career Chapter 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 imagined 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 [man] and suddenly becomes nice (P. 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. 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 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.

**Phenomenological Experiencing**

Experiences of epiphany (Denzin, 1989a, 1989b) and emotional experiences are important markers in ethnographic research and need to be included in the analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Denzin (1989a) 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 also 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 primary theoretical works (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1993) works 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 (i.e., STF, Savickas’s Level III Life Themes, and Narrative/Dialgogical). 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 (P. 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 precipitated a careful and rational search and review of extant scientific literature.

The reading was also associated with a behaviour that was completely unfamiliar to my usual self. Prior to my reading of the work by McAdams (1993) I had never in my life knowingly 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 immediately to 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 (McIlveen, 2006), 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, 1989b).

**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, positioned 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; nor from the consequent Mes authored into discourse and 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, the writing of that Me, is the essence of its existence.

My affinity with the narrative theory broadly, and moreover, the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) 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 renewed upon her democratic will and the kindly benevolence of significant others. Like Eliza, I, through the immersion and placement in multiple, cross cultural and discursive positions, became able to author biculural Mes. The crossing of classes was ultimately manifest in my transition into a middle-class profession, replete with its own discourse 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 plot 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, of recreating their stories. It means putting in place systems that assist them to tell their story anew; just like Eliza. This account exemplifies dialogical self at work: I, multiply positioned, reflexively bringing that theory to a life and moreover to a practice of the profession.

This narrative account exemplifies one approach to the process of developing meaning for career through story (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) 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 into my continuing commitment to individual emancipation and social justice in my professional work.

Upon the convergence of this personal plot, the STF, and narrative theories, the idea of My Career Chapter emerged from the crucible. The idea that emerged was to create:

1. A process in which individuals could write and speak their stories.
2. A storying process through which the influences in the STF are used as a guide.
3. A process using a sentence-completion method that would stimulate the writing process for those who had not the words to start.
4. 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.

Discussion

My Career Chapter was not conceived and constructed within the intellectual confines of scientific and technical literature, not within the environmental context of a psychometric laboratory. It was created by a person with myriad roles and lived contexts and across a significant period of time—it did not simply materialise. Rather than dress up the construction of My Career Chapter in the illusions of psychometrics and scientism, this paper set out to describe the unique human experience that is
contextual of 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.

This study described the personal dimensions associated with the creation and development of My Career Chapter. By doing so, it 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 (1988, 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, 1996, 2004; 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; Humphreys, 2005), I argue otherwise. The gap between theory and practice has been lamented in vocational psychology and career development (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). 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” conceptualisation of the problem, rather than positioning the problem within the realm of the person-the-practitioner per se. Autoethnography is a research methodology by which to bridge the so-called gap 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 scientists and practitioners are
told, the scientific discipline of vocational psychology and its attendant professions will be none the wiser, and a rich source of embedded theory 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.

Study 2:

Reflexive Scientific-Practice: Self-administration of My Career Chapter

Supervision in clinical counselling practice has a long and respected history; however, supervision of career counselling practitioners has received limited attention (McMahon, 2003; McMahon & Patton, 2000; Swanson & O’Brien, 2002). Reflective practice, as self-supervision, in counselling practice has for some decades (Meyer Jr, 1978) been considered a viable means of professional learning, oversight and critique (e.g., Dennin & Ellis, 2003; Lowe, 2002; Magnuson & Norem, 2002; Morrissette, 2001; Ward & House, 1998). Notwithstanding some recent examples (Bronson, 2000; McMahon & Patton, 2002a, 2006b; Watson, 2006), reflective self-supervision in career development practice has not featured significantly in the literature.

Study 1 entailed a significant autobiographical narrating of the creation of My Career Chapter and an evocative and heartful autoethnographic (Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) rendering of self-reflexivity (Aron, 2000). This study of the dissertation also aims to satisfy a pledge to conduct reflective research—which is vital to qualitative research (Cho & Trent, 2006; Etherington, 2004; Haerkamp, 2005; Humphreys, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Parker, 2004). Hence, the current study aimed to investigate a practitioner’s self-application of a career assessment and counselling procedure. The study drew upon the notion of self-reflection (McMahon & Patton, 2002a) in the context of experiential career development learning and training (Patton & McMahon, 2006a).
The Current Study

In order to fully close the circle of reflexive research practice, I set out to determine how I experienced using My Career Chapter for myself, as a member of the ethnographic grouping of scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career development practitioner. This current study reports on that reflexive process.

Method

Assumptions

The paradigm through which this study was conducted and reported was constructivist-interpretivist in ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure, and method (Ponterotto, 2002, 2005). With respect to the notion of reflective practice, this study was broadly informed by the work of Schön (1983) and values the epistemology of practice (Polkinghorne, 1992).

Research Design

In order to rigorously operationalise the notion of reflective practice (Schön, 1983), this study entailed the use of autoethnography (Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Roth, 2005a; Tenni, Smyth, & Boucher, 2003) that would enrich the understanding of the entire research project (Humphreys, 2005). Methodologically, the study principally aimed to use the approach of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), which Anderson differentiated from the emotional and evocative style of autoethnography (e.g., Ellis, 1999) that was used to guide the historical, narrative writing of Study 1. In this study, I intended to capture the moment-to-moment and reflective experiences of using My Career Chapter. As per the differentiation of narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (Smith & Sparkes, 2006), this autoethnography was not so much about producing a story (i.e., narrative analysis), but in providing an analysis of the story generated by My Career Chapter (i.e., analysis
of narrative) and the experience of performing it. Hence, this autoethnography differed from Study 1, which was predominantly historical and narrative in form to my person holistically (i.e., a story).

*Researcher-as-Instrument Statement*

The statement presented in Study 1 holds true for the current study. There are of course limitations to self-report as evidence in qualitative research as “people do not have a clear window into their inner life”; and reflection changes the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139). That caveat notwithstanding, this study openly sought the transformative capacity of reflection because it was assumed (and hoped for) that reflexivity would indeed lead to improvements in (a) my personal understanding of my own careerlife and (b) My Career Chapter and my ability to use it in career counselling practice so as to proffer nuanced professional knowledge in subsequent studies involving the training of other practitioners.

*Participants*

I acted as the primary participant in the study. Given that autoethnography was selected as the most appropriate method of inquiry, it is necessary to sufficiently describe how the study satisfies the criterion of *complete member researcher* (Anderson, 2006). This notion indicates that I should be replete with the conditions of the subject of my study so as to assure my representativeness of that specific psychosocial group. As per Study 1, I lay claim to being a member of the ethnographic grouping, in descending levels of specialisation: scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career development practitioner.

A career development practitioner, who was a State registered psychologist, engaged in the secondary phase of the application of My Career Chapter (viz., the reading out loud and the interpretive process).
Sources of Data

*My Career Chapter.* The process of the study entailed my completing My Career Chapter whilst under self-observation and self-reflection. The first administration occurred in September 2006. The writing of My Career Chapter took approximately two hours. Apart from the actual writing necessary for the completion of the procedure, I wrote reflective notes on the pages of the booklet. Over the days subsequent to completing the procedure, I continued to note any thoughts on the booklet. Having worked through the booklet, as a career counselling client would do as part of their post-session homework, I then sought the support of a career counsellor with whom to go through the reading out loud process. As per the instructions, the counsellor read my manuscript aloud whilst I listened and affectively engaged in the experience. The reflective process began shortly after completing My Career Chapter and continued for two weeks, but was structured through the following process.

*Reflecting on My Career Influences.* The self-reflection process, Reflecting on My Career Influences (McMahon & Patton, 2006b, p. 106), was recommended as a learning and debriefing process for a career counselling training procedure in which participants were to reflect on their own career development and the application of the Systems Theory Framework to their own lives. Given that My Career Chapter was founded on similar theoretical tenets, the structured self-reflection process was adapted to organise my self-reflective response to completing My Career Chapter. The questions in this exercise included personal and professional items.

The questions of Reflecting on My Career Influences were clustered around constructivist notions of *connectedness, reflection, meaning-making, learning,* and *agency.* According to McMahon and Patton, *connectedness* implies a counsellor’s relationship to his or her own personal life story, relationship to his or her clients in
context of his or her phenomenal world, and clarity on the systems of influences which inherently affect the counsellor and practices. The process of reflection relates to the creation of a psychological environment in which the client can feel hopeful and explore the meaning of the past, present and future. Meaning-making relates to the co-construction of understanding between counsellor and client. The process of learning underpins a client’s storying toward lifelong development. Agency pertains to the engendering capacity for action within the client.

In completing the Reflecting on My Career Influences process, I typed notes into a document with the questions. The recorded notes have been presented verbatim in the Results section below, along with questions drawn from the original exercise described by McMahon and Patton (2006b).

Data analysis

Firstly, the notes written on the booklet were inspected for meaningful information. The structured self-reflection exercise Reflecting on My Career Influences (McMahon & Patton, 2006b) provided the basis for the analysis. The nature and purpose of the notes were not organised a priori at the outset of the study. They were allowed to freely emerge according to the experience. The notes were read and re-read in order to determine their characteristics. This process was done whilst being mindful of the original purpose of the study (i.e., to reflect on the experience of using My Career Chapter).

Results

The results are presented according to the conceptual themes of the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (viz., reflection, meaning-making, learning, and agency) and themes abducted from the experiential analysis.
**Connectedness**

*Personal:* What have you come to understand about your own career story by completing *My Career Chapter*? For example, are there any patterns or themes that you were not previously aware of?

I was surprised to see the emphasis upon work ethic and the allusions to my morals and values on this matter. This was evident in my writing that being a male should be related to being a role model. Whilst I am very conscious of the media in my work and have some experience in preparing media releases, speaking on radio, and doing TV interviews, I was surprised to see that I rated media as neither compatible nor incompatible as a career influence. In doing the compatibility task I became conscious of how my social and community life had changed in recent years. Reasons for this include having children, and being busy with work and study.

*Professional:* What have you come to understand about career development in general by completing *My Career Chapter*?

Nothing more that I currently know.

*Personal:* What was it like for you to have the undivided attention of someone listening to your career story?

Although this question is not quite appropriate, as I was not solely engaging another person in the experience (i.e., there were two readings: my own and with another) it was interesting to actually sit and do a structured task as opposed to talking and contemplating freely.

*Professional:* Having completed *My Career Chapter*, what strategies might you adopt in your own practice in order to facilitate a collaborative alliance with your own clients?
This was a very instructive experience. I came to realise how difficult doing this task can be. Apart from having to concentrate and really put effort into it, my hand became tired and painful from writing. I will probably place less pressure on clients to get it done and give them more scope to take additional time.

**Reflection**

*Personal:* What was it like for you to have a space where you could take time to reflect on your career story written in My Career Chapter?

It was useful because I had not really put my work ethic into perspective, and seeing the connection to role models and my father, was instructive.

*Professional:* As a result of experiencing My Career Chapter, what strategies might you adopt in your own practice to create space for reflection for your clients?

Take more time to explain the procedure to clients.

**Meaning-making**

*Personal:* What new or different understandings do you have about yourself as a result of completing My Career Chapter?

When I looked at the STF diagram, it was a bit strange. I have always looked at the diagram from a professional perspective and considered it with respect to theory. For the first time I looked at it from my perspective. This was very different.

*Professional:* What were the strategies or processes that facilitated the generation of new meaning in using My Career Chapter?

I think it is the reflective process and being induced to actually construct a story and then read it.

**Learning**

*Personal:* What is the most significant learning process for you from completing My Career Chapter?
The actual act of doing My Career Chapter was useful, but what was more important was that I was forced to take time out to consider my own career—if only for the purposes of doing a study for the PhD.

_Professional:_ By completing My Career Chapter, what have you learned about the role of the career counsellor and the role of the client?

It would be important to embed My Career Chapter (or any procedure) in a very strong relationship. Otherwise the procedure could be seen by clients as bit too much of an administrative act, rather than a learning process.

_Agency_

_Personal:_ What steps may you take in your own life as result of completing My Career Chapter?

I talk to my wife about working too hard, but maybe I should just let her know that I am very conscious of the fact, and should thank her for being so supportive.

_Professional:_ How might you use My Career Chapter with your clients?

As above; sit the process in a strong relationship first. Perhaps providing it at the drop-in point is not a good idea. Maybe it would be better to give it after the initial interview (which is the recommended procedure anyway). I also found myself circling the influences in the STF when I was instructed to consider the big picture. Perhaps the instructions could be modified to invite clients to do the same. The editorial instructions should be changed to invite the younger editor to use the word “you” in writing back their comments. It felt easier this way.

Administrative problems: The spacing is not wide enough to allow for large handwriting, it should be opened up a little and given extra lines. I wanted to write more, but found the number of lines limiting. The ratings on compatibility for step 4 are a bit confusing; the grey boxes should extend all the way down the
Themes

Two significant themes have been abducted from the experience: personal insights and administrative issues.

Personally, I was moved by the clarity of my expression of work ethic and how this related to my father. I was also affected by the expression of my concern that my work habits had potential to negatively affect my relationships with my wife and children—something probably not unfamiliar to a PhD candidate with a full-time job and associated voluntary work.

The process of completing My Career Chapter required considerable psychological effort. Firstly, I was surprised by the length of time taken to complete the procedure and wondered whether its duration would diminish clients’ capacity or willingness to engage with it as a homework exercise. Secondly, completing the procedure required me to actually ponder over issues: completing the sentence-stems was not a rapid succession of trite responses, they were, rather, considered projections of psychological import. By the end of the process, I was of the opinion that My Career Chapter would be best administered as part of a strong working relationship in career counselling, rather than an “off-the-shelf” self-help procedure.

I developed the impression of "clunkiness" in the administrative process of the compatibility matrices, particularly the matrix requiring ratings of internal, personal influences against one another. There was also some minor difficulty in reading and distinguishing some of the text, particularly the ratings of emotional importance and impact of the influences.
Discussion

This study described my experience of using My Career Chapter, with myself as the autobiographer. The study completed a second phase of critically inspecting the development of My Career Chapter, through my experience as its primary developer, and author of this doctoral research project. To that aim, the study furnished additional insights into the procedure, its applicability for counselling, and issues of interest for the research project.

Although the study was not a narrative analysis per se (i.e., producing a story), as in Study 1, it should be noted that my psychological experience in this study was consistent with the findings of Study 1. The consistency of the narratives of both studies triangulates toward emotive themes pertaining to my Protestant work ethic and relationships with my family, which are inherently associated with my professional practice as a scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career development practitioner.

The key administrative issue that My Career Chapter should be embedded in a counselling relationship requires further inspection, perhaps in subsequent studies involving counsellors and clients. Likewise, the clunkiness of the matrices and visual clarity of the document may need to be brought under inspection by other users, so as to confirm or reject my concerns that their current form may cause irritation for the users. The psychological effort required to complete My Career Chapter may also be of interest. In light of Hansen’s (2002, pp. 318-319) assertion that “if a counselling approach were to be introduced today that emphasized difficult emotional work over an extended period of time…..it would probably not be accepted”, I suspect that not all individuals will happily engage with the procedure because such personalised writing can be difficult or threatening.
This study was based upon the research method *analytic autoethnography*. With respect to Anderson’s (2006) criteria for this method, the study complied with notions of complete member research, analytic reflexivity, and the researcher’s activity and visibility within the text. The study could have been improved, however, through dialogue with informants beyond myself the researcher (cf. Morrow, 2005). Although a career development practitioner was involved in the process of completing My Career Chapter, I could have improved the analytic veracity of the study by formally working through my conclusions and submitting them to the scrutiny of a third party auditor. Without doubt, I have described “an insider’s perspective” (Anderson, p. 386), however I am yet to demonstrate the value of the study with respect to its meaning beyond the study per se. I now turn to that important task.

Whilst *slippage* between roles and identities as an autoethnographer can create problems in research (Medford, 2006), this study inherently required transgression across the boundaries of myself as a scientist-practitioner and myself as a non-scientist-practitioner. That is, this study required me to experience My Career Chapter as a scientist-practitioner; but I could only do this by completing the procedure in its inherently holistic form, which necessarily requires voicing of all of my STF influences as dialogical I-positions, and thus the voicing of non-professional dimensions of myself. Ineluctably therein, I suggest, rests the core issue of a critique of the scientist-practitioner and the attendant allusions to objectivity. In order to make sense of the process of reflexivity in research, as a scientist-practitioner one cannot simply abnegate the critical and suspicious attitude that historically defined the scientist (Neale & Liebert, 1986) as an ethnographic grouping. Instead, to whole-heartedly grapple with the issues of subjectivity in the research process offers a genuine and authentic challenge for psychological science’s ontology and epistemologies—note the plural
expression—and heeds the calls for alternative means of research of potential value for psychology (e.g., Borgen, 1992; Polkinghorne, 1992; Ponterotto, 2002). This study has exemplified one approach to that challenge, by critically studying the experience of a career assessment and counselling procedure, through the vehicle of the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (McMahon & Patton, 2006b), and through the research design itself: autoethnography.

This study was structured around the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (McMahon & Patton, 2006b). The purpose of the current study was to idiographically investigate the primary developer’s experience of My Career Chapter. It is not the intention of this study to aim toward making a generalisation that completion of this exercise indicates the procedure’s value for all scientist-practitioners. Far from seeking generalisation, the current study’s validity, as qualitative research, rests in its transparent description of a process of reflexive research (Cho & Trent, 2006). Its educative authenticity and transformative capacity rest with the reader (scientist-practitioner) who can conceive of its relevance to his or her own practices by reflexively connecting with my account—far be it for me to pre-empt the substance of that subjective experience.

The purpose of this study was to place upon myself an additional burden of satisfying the explicit personally generated responsibility of conducting reflexive research. From a constructivist-interpretivist perspective, such internalised checking gives rise to confidence in the fairness and trustworthiness of the research endeavour, and provides another layer of contextualisation of the other studies of the research project. From a critical-ideological perspective, the study demonstrates a genuine attempt to present myself as a researcher who is transparent and open to public critique. Self-reported qualitative data is inherently limited (Polkinghorne, 2005), hence
conducting reflexive research in isolation runs the risk of solipsistic turning in on itself, with the researcher uncritically believing in all that he or she purports: this study puts a brake on that treacherous spiral.

In conclusion, I suggest that the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise adds another dimension to the process of critically evaluating qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures, and their application by practitioners. Reflecting on My Career Influences could be used in combination with other methods; take for example the guidelines for constructing such procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) and the critical reflection on a practitioner’s worldview (Watson, 2006), to bring about a semi-structured process of critical reflection for the purposes of training, practice, and research into the process of career counselling. The study thus demonstrates another means by which the theory and practice of career development may be integrated by the scientist-practitioner, or the “practical theorist” (Collin, 1996b).
CHAPTER SEVEN:
COUNSELLOR-USERS’ EXPERIENCE

The study of counsellors’ experience of counselling and psychotherapy has received some attention in the literature (McLeod, 1990b; Mearns & Dryden, 1990). Whilst there has been a preponderance of research into the client-factors as distinct from the counsellor-factors in the process and outcome of career counselling (Whiston & Oliver, 2005), research into the career counsellor’s experience has examined the interaction of client and career counsellor: for example, counsellor’s response behaviour during counselling (Watkins Jr, Savickas, Brizzi, & Manus, 1990); turn-taking in vocational test interpretation (Reed, Patton, & Gold, 1993); the difference between client and counsellor expectations (Lim & Patton, 2006); and what expert counsellors would do with respect to their interventions and intentions (e.g., Kirschner, Hoffman, & Hill, 1994; Whiston, Lindeman, Rahardja, & Reed, 2005). Heppner and Heppner (2003) indicated that studying the cognitions of the career counsellor may offer a promising avenue through which more can be learned about the process of career counselling.

The stream of research into counsellors’ experience of counselling has entailed the development of questionnaires that pertain to client and counsellor experiences: take for example the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (Stiles, 1980; Stiles & Snow, 1984) which measures affective engagement; the Working Alliance Inventory (Hatcher & Gillaspy, 2006; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989; Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989) which assesses the counselling relationship; and those methods which tap into the counsellors’ internal dialogue and appraisals through the thought-listing instrument method (Morran,
The study of counsellors’ subjective experience of career counselling is quite distinct from the objective study of counsellors’ behaviours during counselling. The former is phenomenological and subjective, whereas the other is an objectified process, which, among other things, may be used for the development of generalisable taxonomies of macro and micro-activities within sessions (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Studies into career counsellors’ sense of self-efficacy (Heppner, Multon, Gysbers, Ellis, & Zook, 1998; O’Brien, Heppner, Flores, & Bikos, 1997) and their perceptions of important events during career counselling (Anderson & Niles, 2000) have, for argument’s sake, offered a useful addition to the literature of understanding process of career counselling from the counsellors’ perspective, or at least their appraisal of their performance. There is nevertheless, a significant paucity of research into this important dimension of the process of career counselling.

This chapter of the dissertation aims to elucidate two areas of enquiry. Firstly, it addresses My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommendations for qualitative career assessment procedures. Whilst investigating the former, the chapter contains studies which explore counsellors’ views of My Career Chapter in reference to their own experience of it and how it would operate in their counselling practices.

Study 3:
Counsellors’ Personal Experience and Appraisal of My Career Chapter

McMahon, Patton and Watson (2003) established a set of recommendations for the construction of qualitative assessment procedures: these included:

1. Ground the assessment process in theory.
2. Test the career assessment process.
3. Ensure that the process can be completed in a reasonable time frame.
4. Design a process that fosters holism.
5. Write instructions for the client.
6. Write readable and easily understood instructions.
7. Sequence logical, simple, small, achievable steps.
8. Provide a focused and flexible process.
10. Include a debriefing process.

The recommendations also reflect guidelines on how to apply qualitative procedures in career counselling (McMahon & Patton, 2002b). Notwithstanding their relatively recent publication, the recommendations have received some attention in the literature with respect to their application (e.g., McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005).

The Current Study

A critical and reflexive desk audit would go some way towards describing My Career Chapter’s processes and its alignment with the recommendations for qualitative procedures (as in the Preliminary Study); however, such an audit would not fully account for the actual experience of its application by counsellors. The current study\(^3\) investigates the process of My Career Chapter by studying counsellors’ reactions to the full version of My Career Chapter. To do so, the research is centred upon counsellors’ appraisal of My Career Chapter's alignment with the recommendations for qualitative career assessment tools (e.g., McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003).

Method

Assumptions

The current study was constructivist in ontology and epistemology. It sought to understand both the individual and shared experiences of counsellors, and acknowledged the co-constructive influence of dialogue within the group training and follow-up interviews. As such, a phenomenological research design was chosen.

Research Design

A qualitative research method was used to capture the richness of unique personal experiences and opinions. The study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA is phenomenological and hermeneutic in theoretical origin and aims to facilitate understanding of how individuals make sense of their psychosocial worlds, experiences, and events. However, IPA transcends mere description, or “giving voice” to the participants; it progresses toward higher theoretical interpretations of participants’ meanings (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). IPA thus satisfies the assumption of constructivist ontology and epistemology. Application of IPA in this study aimed to explore counsellors’ experience of My Career Chapter, based upon their learning in an intensive training workshop and their personal application of the procedure.

Researcher-as-Instrument Statement

As the primary developer of My Career Chapter my own appraisal of it has been accounted for through autoethnographic writing (in Study 1), personal application of the procedure (in Study 2), and application in counselling. The current study was conceived out of a desire to understand the experience of other users of My Career Chapter and concurrently to seek a critical review of its qualities, so as to inform modifications or improvements to its composition.
Participants

As small, concentrated, homogenous samples are preferable for IPA research, the sampling procedure for this study was deliberate and selective. Eleven counselling professionals were invited to participate. Their counselling disciplinary backgrounds were psychology and education. Whilst there was homogeneity in all of the participants being counselling professionals, a measure of diversity was introduced to broaden the scope of opinions. Personal counsellors and counsellor-trainers were included deliberately to bring the potential for an alternative critique of My Career Chapter; one which should be devoid of engrained assumptions pertaining to career counselling.

Four participants conducted career counselling as their main professional activity; five conducted personal counselling as their main professional activity [two of whom specialised in cross-cultural counselling]; and two were counselling academics who were professionally involved in the training of counsellors at the graduate level.

Sources of Data

In an intensive workshop format, participants were trained in the theory and recommended applications of My Career Chapter. This training process firstly sought to ensure that potential users would have a reasonable grounding in the use of My Career Chapter and secondly to glean their experiences and appraisals of it with regard to the recommendations for the qualitative career assessment processes (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). In summary, the training program comprised:

1. An orientation and introduction to the recommendations for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003).

2. A self-reflection exercise: What is Your Career Counselling Worldview? (Watson, 2006), which facilitated participants’ consideration of the
theoretical, practical and cultural dimensions of their approach to counselling.


4. A description of the theory of narrative career counselling and an overview of exemplary techniques, for example, My System of Career Influences (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005).

5. An account of My Career Chapter’s development and its relationship to theory and other techniques.

6. Personally completing My Career Chapter as an individual, including the reading aloud of their career story to a participant in order to simulate the clients’ experience in counselling.

7. A group discussion and debriefing.

The training took place over a period of four hours and included regular breaks. Although the training session flowed according to a schedule, participants engaged in discussions throughout the presentation. This allowed them to clarify ideas and to share opinions on topical issues.

*Interviews.* Smith and Osborn (2003) recommended semi-structured questionnaires for the collection of data for an IPA study. The eleven participants were interviewed over a period of no more than two weeks following the training workshop. Excluding introductions and development of rapport, the durations of interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and analyses. Transcription was performed by a commercial agency. The audio-recording
of one interview failed and consequently collaboratively written notes were recorded immediately after the interview. These data were not included in the final analyses of transcripts using IPA, but were reserved as a secondary source of data for checking against the final analysis. The interviews were conducted using the Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire which was developed by the author.

Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire. A set of stimulus questions was developed for each recommendation for the design and delivery of qualitative career counselling and assessment procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). The list of questions is presented in Appendix C. The following question serves as a sample using the criterion of “ground the assessment process in theory”: How does My Career Chapter relate to theory and which aspects of its application of theory stood out for you? The questions were compiled in a semi-structured questionnaire format to flexibly enable open-ended responses from participants.

Workshop discussion. A group discussion immediately followed the workshop. Participants’ initial impressions and general opinions of My Career Chapter were sought and shared with the group. The discussion was not conducted to obtain primary data, but was used as a source of information to prepare for the potential issues that would arise in the subsequent interviews and to enable participants to reflect upon their own views in the context of the views of others.

Written reflections. Following the workshop, the participants were emailed the headings contained within the Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire. They were asked to respond to each heading and return the email. The text of the email was later used as a stimulus for the subsequent interviews with participants. The emails were also read as another source of preparatory material for the interviews which ensued.
Preliminary information gleaned from the workshop discussion and emails were reflected upon prior to engaging in the analysis proper. Ten transcripts were analysed using IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Prior to commencing the analysis, the transcripts were read whilst listening to the audio recording. This read-and-listen process was done to refresh, note transcript omissions or errors, and to actively re-engage with the dialogue of the interviews.

The initial step of IPA entailed repeatedly reading through one interview transcript before working through any of the others. In the recommended procedure for IPA, notes are recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript during the first reading. Rather than write in the margins, in this study the comments were written on each transcript using word-processing editing and comments features. These notes indicated specific experiences revealed in the text. Upon completing this pass of the transcript, the transcript was read again, taking into account the initial notes and entering themes that subsumed the notes. This thematic level of analysis was conceptually higher than that of the first and aimed to create psychological understandings of the text, which were both grounded in an individual’s interview, yet sufficiently abstract to allow for connection with the themes from other cases. The themes were then listed at the bottom of the transcript and reviewed to determine conceptual clusters, which were subsequently checked against the raw transcript for meaningfulness. Text which was indicative of clusters’ and themes’ meanings was retained for exemplification. The entire process was repeated for each individual transcript. Thus each individual’s transcript was analysed idiographically so as to create a full account of his or her experience. Participants were provided a copy of the interview transcript for verification and keeping.
Following the iterative procedure performed on each case, a final list of themes and superordinate clusters was constructed so as to indicate the aggregated meanings from the group. This interpretative process entailed repeatedly moving back and forward across the participants’ themes and checking if themes were conceptually related to a superordinate cluster. This list was used to enable a thematic reporting of results.

*Trustworthiness.* A check was made to assure trustworthiness of the data and the analysis according to the paradigm-specific requirements for constructivist research (Morrow, 2005). Whilst the data saturated relatively early in the analysis, care was taken to abduct negative evidence and discrepancy within the data to ensure a balance of participants’ experiences and to satisfy the criterion of fairness. Accordingly, whenever appropriate, divergent views have been presented in the results section. The criterion of ontological authenticity requires that participants’ data be expanded and elaborated. This requirement was satisfied as an inherent part of the IPA interview process in which their experiences were elaborated to the point of shared understanding with the interviewer. Educative authenticity was satisfied through the group discussion at the end of the workshop, in which participants shared their experiences. Catalytic authenticity pertains to action which is stimulated by the research process. This criterion will be explicated in the discussion section as it was borne out in a decision to modify My Career Chapter as an outcome of the study. Morrow’s criteria pertaining to meaning, especially shared meaning, were satisfied through the process of the participants being able to confirm their transcripts and the themes derived from them. It should be noted, however, IPA does not require the final interpretation to be a shared construction, as it ultimately represents meanings generated and owned by the researcher, rather than the participants.
Results

Four superordinate clusters were conceived from the themes derived from the IPA of participants’ interview transcripts, and these were *theory, administrative process, counselling process,* and *counselling relationship.*

Theory

Notwithstanding the specific question addressing theory, the link between My Career Chapter and theory was a prominent feature of the interview transcripts. All of the counsellors acknowledged the presence of theory in the design or operation of My Career Chapter. The Systems Theory Framework and narrative approach were explicitly emphasised, along with notions of holism and allusions to person-centred theory.

Well it relates very strongly to the Systems Theory Framework because it incorporates questions that ask about a lot of the different influences on a person’s career. So it’s very well grounded in that particular theory. (Counsellor 8).

This was not simply an intellectualization of the relationship between theory and My Career Chapter. Having actually used the procedure on themselves, each counsellor had a lived, personal experience of how the process connected to theory. Following on from the previous example:

What stood out for me was that it really allowed me to focus on each of those important influences. Some less important than others. But it really, I guess, focused my attention on particular aspects of the theory. So, you know, how does my age or my gender or my values or my interests influence my career decision making. So I found that really helpful too. (Counsellor 8)
Here Counsellor 8 exemplified the personalisation of the process in her repeatedly referring to herself, “me”, in the recounting of her experience and its connection to theory—in this case STF and its multiple influences.

Whilst acknowledging the presence of narrative theory, one counsellor grasped My Career Chapter within the scope of her technical eclectic approach to counselling.

I guess I looked at it more from a pragmatic point of view as opposed to a theoretical point of view, but….you certainly saw elements of that coming through—the narrative kind of approach… (Counsellor 2)

Interestingly, two of the personal counsellors mentioned a relationship to psychodynamic theory, particularly in relation to projecting into the sentence-stems as part of the story writing process.

Administrative Process

There was consistency in the opinions that the instructions were user-friendly and that the procedure followed a logical and transparent sequence. Flexibility in the procedure was likewise acknowledged, particularly in reference to the sentence-completion process. Three crucial themes pertaining to administrative process which are worthy of explication here include the length/duration to complete My Career Chapter; the capacity of My Career Chapter to be mediated by different client groups and characteristics; and the compatibility matrices.

Length/duration. All counsellors commented upon the length of My Career Chapter, or more accurately, the time and effort required for its completion. Given the account of their experiences, it would likely take at least two hours to complete without feeling pressured. Notwithstanding their sense of the required duration, some of the counsellors believed that the time taken was not necessarily a negative feature of the procedure. This was borne out in the belief that such a comprehensive storying of one’s
life or the process of career exploration should not be something short or perfunctory.

This was counterbalanced with suggestions that some clients who attend career
counselling are often anxious for a “quick answer” to the conundrum of career
uncertainty.

…is there, in fact, a real timeframe? Do we need a timeframe? Yes, maybe in
practical terms when we’re interviewing people and doing this, but it could be
emphasising to them that, you know, this isn’t hard cast wrought in iron for the
rest of your life. (Counsellor 4)

This counsellor was suggesting that whilst the My Career Chapter does take time,
clients’ desires for a quick solution should be assuaged by the counselling attitude that
one’s career story changes over time and its development should not be seen as
something that can be completed quickly and packaged up neatly.

Counsellor 10’s comments on the length of My Career Chapter also served to
raise another commonly shared view amongst the counsellors.

…it is long, but the length, in and of it-self, may actually be a positive thing, as
those clients who do it, get involved in it, and actually display a high degree of
commitment to what they are doing. That commitment produces a great
narrative. (Counsellor 10)

The question of client commitment to completing My Career Chapter was entwined
with the issue of its suitability for different clients.

Suitability. All of the counsellors considered My Career Chapter to fall within
the achievable reach of most adult clients. However, the most predominant theme
related to achievability, was client suitability in terms of client age, or more correctly,
developmental stage. In particular, the counsellors raised concerns that My Career
Chapter may not be suitable for school-aged clients. Notwithstanding the fact that it
was not designed for young adolescents, the question focused the discussion upon how My Career Chapter could be improved or limited in its application to those who would benefit most.

…I think, younger people, particularly adolescents, would probably need to do a little bit at a time – that’s just my opinion – and maybe then be able to hear a little bit at a time, rather than one big hit, and do it over a period of several weeks and then culminate the whole thing. That might be interesting, because it might allow them that time to reflect as well. (Counsellor 7)

Counsellor 7 was suggesting that school-based applications may be successful if the My Career Chapter was segmented into the steps inherent in the design (i.e., Steps 1 through 7). Although segmenting in this way could enable classroom teaching, the notion of segmentation received equivocal support, with some counsellors suggesting that a concentrated processing experience may be psychologically effective for counselling.

Age was not the only factor pertinent to client suitability. The verbal skills or psychological-mindedness of the client were brought into the frame, with one of the counsellors claiming that she preferred a visual mode of processing and that the considerable verbal content was challenging. In a variation to the suggestion of advanced verbal skills as a requisite, another counsellor, who described himself as a good talker and a story teller, but not enamoured of reading, said:

Emotionally, …when I first saw the document there was that instant reaction of the school boy who wants to go out and run around and be free and who is being sat down in front of a big task that he feels is tapping into his weakness, so I had that emotional reaction to it. (Counsellor 3)

Compatibility matrices. The final administrative theme related to Steps 3 and 4, the compatibility matrices (i.e., STF internal influences v. external influences, and
While there was evidence that the counsellors saw value in the matrices as a “warm-up” to the writing proper, in the sentence-completion task Step 5, and as a process to orient the client to the decentred influences of career (according the STF), there was some disquiet on having to complete two matrices. One counsellor found the process appropriate with respect to expanding her view of her career, but frustrating in that she wanted to get on with the writing task in Step 5. One could readily imagine some clients feeling the same.

Counselling process

Suitability issues notwithstanding, there was an unequivocal shared view that My Career Chapter would be an effective career assessment and counselling procedure. Four main themes were derived from the data: client-driven process, holism, reading process, and debriefing.

Client-driven process. Further to the allusions to client-centred counselling mentioned in the theory section, the counsellors saw the process of completing My Career Chapter as having significant client focus with emphasis upon it being client-directed, as a self-exploration.

Holism. There was consistency in opinion that My Career Chapter was holistic in nature and that it comprehensively drew in the many influences that make up career.

…I can’t think of anything else that you could possibly put in it. I don’t think that there was anything that could have been in there that wasn’t. (Counsellor 5)

Moreover, the process of completing My Career Chapter required the writer to bring the various elements of his or her story into a coherent narrative.

I think it’s the first instrument that I’ve come across that has really allowed me to look at so many different aspects of who I am and my environment and puts that all together to form a nice story, you know. It’s not just bits and pieces, it
forms a nice holistic story about who I am, where I’ve come from and where I want to go. (Counsellor 8)

This personal reflection and resultant awareness for Counsellor 8 captures the essence of the breadth of influences of the STF, and the idea of bringing them together into a “nice story” across the past, present and future.

Reading process. The counsellors were moved by the process in which their fellow workshop participant read aloud their story written in Step 5. This sharing is what would transpire in a counselling session, with the counsellor reading the client’s story. An important dimension to the reading process is its apparent capacity to induce metacognitive reflection.

…now that I’ve heard [my story] this way, I would attend to this aspect rather than to the aspect that I’m might have had in my mind when I was writing it. (Counsellor 6)

it was a very powerful exercise, actually. You know, when you write something, you usually just dismiss it out of your brain, and move on to whatever it is. But when you write something and then someone reads it back to you, you know, you re-engage with those thoughts. So…that process was really, really interesting. It made me think about what I’d written and made me think about what I was thinking. (Counsellor 7)

Whilst reflective learning is intrinsic to My Career Chapter and its co-construction of a career story, this must be seen within the context of the entire career counselling experience and relationship.

I didn’t know you before I came here, I’ve done my narrative, you’ve read it to me and it’s brought us very close, it’s your body and my words and so there is a
strong link in affiliation. That might be quite a powerful thing in whatever goes next in terms of my feelings towards you. (Counsellor 10)

This counsellor was suggesting that a client and counsellor are potentially locked in an intimate relationship and the reading process should thus be treated carefully and respectfully.

Debriefing. The counsellors acknowledged that a debriefing process was inherent to the process of completing My Career Chapter, particularly as part of the reading back activity and subsequent co-construction between client and counsellor. However, there were notes of caution suggesting that the debriefing needed to be made more explicit within the procedure and the counselling itself. For example:

…there still needs to be a checking out at regular intervals that the clients’ affect is being respected and understood in this, and giving the client that opportunity to say no that’s not really the emphasis I would have placed on that. (Counsellor 3)

The emphasis upon the debriefing consolidated the argument that My Career Chapter should be part of a broader counselling experience.

Counselling Relationship

There was unequivocal opinion that a fundamental requirement for the application of My Career Chapter was its administration within the context of a counselling relationship.

Well it depends how much the person is willing to reveal….It asks a lot of personal questions and some people aren’t comfortable with revealing personal stuff even with a counsellor (Counsellor 9)
In this example, Counsellor 9 captures the importance of career counselling being a first-and-foremost a form of counselling, with all the attendant requirements of person-centeredness and sensitivity.

Despite counsellors acknowledging My Career Chapter’s capacity as a self-directing self-help procedure, the counsellors saw its complexity as a self-exploration process as an indicator of the need to subsume it under a broader client intervention, namely career counselling. The counsellors were firm in stating that My Career Chapter should not be used in isolation. This was not merely about ensuring that clients worked through the procedure correctly; it was, moreover, about ensuring that the benefits of its capacity for effectiveness would be optimal.

I think it’s a matter that has to be addressed in building rapport and trust and respect between the counsellor-client relationships. I think that’s got to be imperative for [My Career Chapter] to work. (Counsellor 2)

In this example, Counsellor 2 was emphasising how the counselling relationship is vital for client engagement in the process of completing My Career Chapter and consequently ensuring its effectiveness within the counselling frame.

Discussion

This study investigated professional counsellors’ experience of using My Career Chapter and their judgment on how well it aligned with the standards for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). The study was not simply a critical review based upon a desk audit. Instead, the study was based upon the personal experience of actually completing My Career Chapter, reflecting upon the experience in a group discussion, taking reflective notes after the experience, and moreover, reflecting on the process by way of a semi-structured interview, which was the ultimate focus of the research. Having conducted the research
using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, four predominant clusters were formulated: theory, administrative process, counselling process, and counselling relationship.

In respect to theory, the counsellors’ views on the relationship of My Career Chapter to theory confirmed explicit links to theory, particularly the STF, constructivist and narrative theories. They also connected My Career Chapter to broader theoretical notions of holism and person-centeredness which permeate the constructivist approach to career counselling. The counsellors’ suggestion of the relationship between the sentence-stem completion process and psychodynamic projection is noteworthy because of the historical origin of the sentence-completion paradigm (Loevinger, 1985), which was derived from psychodynamic ego-psychology. That connection notwithstanding, the psychological construct of projection may be, nevertheless, readily reformulated through constructivist lens. In addition, the views of the counsellor who took a pragmatic approach with allusions to eclecticism, would lend credence to the suggestion that My Career Chapter may be useful for practitioners whose practices are informed by theoretical traditions other than constructivism. Given the overall agreement on the nexus of My Career Chapter and theory, it would be fair to conclude that this particular career assessment and counselling procedure stands as a theoretically-informed contribution to the literature on career development practice.

With respect to administrative process, the counsellors suggested that My Career Chapter’s instructions were clear and readily understood. Furthermore, they suggested it was a flexible and achievable procedure. However, there was a caveat on clients’ level of language ability or psychological-mindedness needed to complete the procedure. Notwithstanding the deliberately verbal features of My Career Chapter, as a means of differentiating it from visually oriented procedures (e.g., My System of Career
Influences), the theme of suitability for different clients was notable. This stimulates the question of whether My Career Chapter would be useful for school-aged adolescents and goes to the process question of client-subtype (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Whilst it was not originally designed for such a group, the question related to issues such as users’ level of language ability, developmental readiness, and career maturity. As a consequence, further study is required to address the question of whether My Career Chapter would be appropriate for high school students. The compatibility matrices were granted a mixed evaluation, with some opinion indicating their usefulness and other opinion suggesting they were too onerous. Without deleting the compatibility task from My Career Chapter altogether, especially given its purpose as a decentring exercise, the tasks used in this version may need to be modified in order to prevent negative reactions.

As for counselling process, the counsellors suggested that My Career Chapter is an holistic client-focused counselling procedure. The most significant element of the counselling process was the shared reading of the story written in Step 5—the sentence-completion activity—which is essentially the main body of the story. In the current study, the counsellors judged the reading aloud process as a powerful experience for counselling and clearly as the core of the procedure. In addition, the metacognitive learning of the reading process reflects the notion of career counselling being a learning process (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Whilst a debriefing process is inherent in My Career Chapter, there were laudable concerns that this necessary element may not be sufficiently obvious. Thus future reformulations of My Career Chapter would need to emphasise the importance of debriefing, particularly given its nexus with the counselling relationship.
Embedding My Career Chapter in a counselling relationship was seen as vital to its appropriate application. As such, My Career Chapter was seen as being dependent upon the co-operation of client and counsellor. This reflects the pre-eminence of the relationship in constructivist counselling (Mahoney, 2003) and career counselling (Meara & Patton, 1994), and the valuing of individualised interpretation and feedback (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Brown et al., 2003). It also responds to the call for research into career counselling process which investigates the role of the working alliance (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Notwithstanding the importance of administering My Career Chapter through counselling, the reading aloud process of My Career Chapter may be of value to a client if he or she were to conduct the process with a person from another trusting relationship (e.g., friend or spouse). Extending the process into other relationships would align with the notion that career is constructed through a variety of dialogical exchanges: not just in the milieu of career counselling. Future research could investigate if the outcomes of a client’s discussions with another person could be returned to the counselling setting, whilst retaining the full impact of the career counselling experience.

The approach to IPA used in this study reasonably satisfied the criteria for trustworthiness of qualitative research and the criteria specific to constructivist research: fairness, authenticity and meaning for constructivist research (Morrow, 2005). The results of this IPA study may be read by researchers and practitioners as a faithful account of a specific group of professional counsellors’ perspectives of My Career Chapter. The counsellors who participated in this study had expertise in the counselling of young and mature adults. From that limited perspective, the results indicate that My Career Chapter satisfies the recommendations for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures. In conclusion, this result provides additional support for the
claim that written exercises and individualised interpretation and feedback are valuable
career interventions (Brown et al., 2003).

Study 4:
Guidance Counsellors’ Appraisal of My Career Chapter’s Suitability for Adolescents

The previous research study investigated counsellors’ experience of My Career
Chapter through an intensive training workshop and personal experience of the
procedure. That study elucidated the counsellors’ experience of My Career Chapter
with respect to their work with an adult client population. It found broad support for
My Career Chapter’s alignment with the standards for the construction (McMahon,
Patton, & Watson, 2003) and application (McMahon & Patton, 2002b) of constructivist
career assessment and counselling procedures. The counsellors who participated in that
research also raised questions regarding My Career Chapter’s suitability for adolescents
and clients who were not “verbal” or “psychologically-minded”.

The Current Study

This study extended Study 3 which focused upon the interpretation of the
reported experiences of counsellors who used My Career Chapter. In this study, the
experience of counsellors was studied from a group perspective, again using
interpretative methodology. Furthermore, following on from the question pertaining to

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4 This study was published as: McIlveen, P., Patton, W., & Hoare, P. N. (2007). My
Career Chapter: Guidance counsellors' appraisal of its suitability for adolescents.
adolescents that was raised in Study 3, the current study investigated the potential of My Career Chapter for an adolescent client population. The study engaged guidance counsellors who worked with adolescent clients in a focus group. The study also sought their opinions with respect to My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommended standards for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). The study was reported according to the recommendations for qualitative research in counselling (Morrow, 2005).

Method

Assumptions

The current study was constructivist in ontology and epistemology (Ponterotto, 2005). It sought to understand the shared experiences and opinions of guidance counsellors, and acknowledged the co-constructive influence of dialogue within the group training and follow-up interviews.

Research Design

This study used a focus group (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007; Wilkinson, 2003) as the method of qualitative enquiry. Focus groups have been presented as a useful process for the construction of psychological assessment tools to improve their content validity (Vogt, King, & King, 2004). Furthermore, focus groups have been used for process research into other qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures to investigate alignment with the recommendations for qualitative assessment and counselling procedures (e.g., McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005).

Research-as-Instrument Statement

The primary developer’s appraisal of My Career Chapter (viz., the first author), has been accounted for through reflexive research (Etherington, 2004), performed as autoethnographic writing, personal application of the procedure, professional
application in career counselling, and critical reflection through an independent audit (Smith, 2003) of the aforementioned reflexive research. This study was conceived out of a commitment to understand the experience of other users of My Career Chapter and to concurrently seek a critical review of its qualities, so as to inform modifications or improvements to its composition.

Participants

Given the specificity of the topic in question, the focus group method lent itself to a sampling frame that would be best represented by guidance counsellors whose expertise was in the area of adolescent issues. Thus, a homogenous group of seven participants was recruited for this study. The recommended number of participants for focus group research varies, with some estimates at four to eight participants (Wilkinson, 2003) and others at six to twelve (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Thus the number of participants in the current study fell within the recommended ranges. All participants, but one, directly provided career education classes and career counselling to students, as class pupils or individual career counselling clients. One participant was an academic involved in the training of guidance counsellors. The participants’ knowledge and skills in relation to adolescent counselling were the specific criteria for their selection. Their participation in the focus group was voluntary. They were invited to participate in the workshop which was part of a suite of professional development services offered by the Faculty of Education of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. Upon invitation, the participants were aware that the workshop on My Career Chapter would be followed by a focus group seeking their views on its applicability to adolescents.

The group included a Group Leader (viz., myself as the chief investigator) and a Group Monitor who had been previously trained in the application of My Career
Chapter. The Group Leader facilitated the discussion. The Group Monitor’s role was to participate as a critical, but silent observer of the group dynamics and to record notes that would be used to validate the recordings and themes drawn from analysis.

Sources of Data

The participants were provided training in the theory and recommended applications of My Career Chapter. This training process sought first to ensure that potential users would have a reasonable grounding in the use of My Career Chapter and secondly to glean their experiences and appraisals of it with regard to the standards for the qualitative career assessment processes (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). The training program was similar to that deployed for Study 3; however, as there were limitations on the time to operate the training and focus group, rather than completing the entire My Career Chapter (as was the case in the previous study) only a selection of its components were completed by the participants. These included the warm-up exercise, thinking about the big picture, internal/external compatibility process, writing of one page of the manuscript, and sampling the reading back and interpretation process. The training took place over the period of two hours and included rest breaks and discussions.

Focus Group Discussion. Immediately following the training session, all participants joined the critical focus group discussion. Discussion was stimulated by the Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire (see below). At the commencement of the focus group discussion, participants were instructed to focus on My Career Chapter in relation to their own practices with high school adolescents.

The group leader went to some length to explain that the purpose of the group was to determine the participants’ perspective on My Career Chapter; an excerpt from the transcript attests to this intention:
What I would like you to do is critically think about this process, from the point-of-view of working in a school setting...... Don’t think about the general adult market. It’s about how you would practise too. I’m asking you from the point of view of me not being a school practitioner......I don’t understand your perspective, and that’s what I’m interested in hearing.

The stimulus questions were read out by the focus group leader (i.e., the chief investigator) and a discussion ensued. The focus group discussion ran for one hour and was digitally recorded for later transcription (by a professional agency) and analyses. This recording was supplemented by the Group Monitor’s notes.

Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire. As with the previous study, the set of stimulus questions for each recommendation pertaining to the design and delivery of qualitative career counselling and assessment procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) was used in this study in a semi-structured delivery. The discussion was allowed to move according to its own dynamics rather than being constrained to the questions.

Group Monitor’s Notes. The notes recorded by the group monitor were integrated into the analysis as a secondary check for veracity of the interpretation of the transcript.

Written Comments. Participants were provided a sheet of paper with the questions, and sufficient space in which to write comments. These were collected at the end of the focus group for inclusion in the data analysis for a secondary check on interpretation of the transcript.

Data Analysis

The data generated from the focus group were analysed with respect to recommended procedures (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). As for generating
meaning by hermeneutic analysis, the transcript was analysed using the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Prior to commencing the analysis, the audio recording of the focus group session was listened to; then another concurrent reading through the transcript was undertaken. This re-read-and-listen process was done to refresh, note transcript omissions or errors, and to actively re-engage with the dialogue of the group.

Notes were recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript during the first reading. These notes indicated specific experiences revealed in the text. Upon completing this pass of the transcript, it was read again, taking into account the initial notes and entering themes that subsumed the notes. This thematic level of analysis was conceptually higher than that of the first and aimed to create psychological understandings of the text. Both levels of analysis were grounded in the comments, yet sufficiently abstract to allow for connection with conceptual themes. The themes were then listed at the bottom of the transcript and reviewed to determine conceptual clusters, which were subsequently checked against the raw transcript for meaningfulness. Text which was indicative of clusters’ and themes’ meanings was retained for exemplification.

Trustworthiness. A check was made to assure trustworthiness of the data and the analysis according to the paradigm-specific requirements for constructivist or postpositivist research (Morrow, 2005). Hence, the next phase of analysis involved comparing and contrasting the Group Monitor’s notes with those of the original analysis. No discrepancies were evident and there was concordance across the documents. To further this process of reliability, the Group Monitor read through the notes and themes of the original analysis to check if they compared and contrasted with her reading of the transcript and her notes taken during the group session. The Group
Monitor attested that there were no discrepancies, and concordance between the interpretation, the transcript, her notes, and recollections, was evident.

Results

The group indicated that My Career Chapter had potential for adolescent clients who were exploring their career options. They all agreed that it had significant value as a career assessment and counselling procedure, which was amenable to career education classes. In order to improve its applicability for a young client population, the group offered suggestions for administrative modifications. Four superordinate themes were derived from the transcript of the focus group: theory, administrative process and client capacity, pedagogical improvements, and engendering dialogue in discourse.

Theory

There was an unequivocal perception that My Career Chapter had inherent and obvious links to the three major theories underpinning its development, especially the Systems Theory Framework. This point was not elaborated upon any further.

Administrative Process and Client Capacity

The participants agreed that the complete process of My Career Chapter was not beyond the scope of their younger client group. Nevertheless, they did indicate that some students may have difficulty with the procedure; not because of age per se, but because of their limited ability to reflect upon the process to generate personalised learning from the experience. They were also concerned by its length and the seemingly complicated instructions. Their suggestions indicated that it was not the tasks per se (i.e., the steps), but the combination of complex instructions and sheer number of tasks. However, in order to overcome this perceived threat, the participants
spontaneously proffered pedagogically informed solutions so as to enable My Career Chapter’s application in the career education classroom or individual counselling.

**Pedagogical Improvements**

The first recommendation for improvement of the administrative process was to apply My Career Chapter across successive classes or sessions and “step it out”. This could involve doing a Step for homework and then discussing the outcomes at the next class or session, and reflecting upon the learning with class peers or with the counsellors. This progressive approach was seen as a means to scaffold upward through the experience, building upon each step and each learning experience.

Given the visual complexity of the matrix, it was suggested that completing the ratings using different coloured pencils would assist in making the process easier and more readily interpretable. The other alternative—to support students with different learning styles—was to use different media as alternatives to the purely written work of the procedure (e.g., collage) (cf. Adams, 2003).

The final suggestion entailed applying My Career Chapter in a paired situation; the student with either a class peer or a parent/carer. This would involve the student working through the tasks while the partner asked the items in an interview format and wrote the responses, concurrently asking exploratory questions. Apart from reducing the actual labour of completing the procedure, it would potentially expand a student’s breadth of self-understanding through shared reflection and feedback, and perhaps enhance his or her family involvement in career exploration and decision making. This is discussed further in the next theme.

**Engendering Dialogue in Discourse**

The participants indicated that the process of completing My Career Chapter would facilitate young people voicing their thoughts about life and career. The
expression “getting it out of their head” was used by participants to allude to a process through which students would be able to talk and write about themselves in a positive, exploratory environment. One participant suggested that the process induced a form of the “empty-chair technique” in which a client has dialogue with an imaginary version of himself or herself. As guidance counsellors and teachers, they believed this process to be important in their work toward encouraging adolescents to explore their lives.

The participants recognised the importance of working through My Career Chapter with another person, such as a career education teacher or a counsellor. They emphasised the potential for co-constructive outcomes; take for example this comment:

It’s like holding up a mirror for the client to look back at themselves…..It’s like putting a puzzle together. That you might have lots of little pieces in your hands, but somebody helps you to put them together to make a big picture.

In talking about the suggestion to include others in the application of My Career Chapter, the guidance counsellors recognised that students had different social selves and would present different selves to others in life (e.g., the difference between working with a parent or a peer).

…we talk about the different personas kids take on in their different groups……

So I think by doing that, by having a different audience, they can actually find it easier to access different lives, different voices.

Whilst acknowledging that there would be differences across dyads, they saw this as potential means of assisting a student to explore himself or herself through a process of triangulating separate stories and reflecting upon the differences and commonalities of the two experiences.
Discussion

This study of guidance counsellors’ experience and views of My Career Chapter established the perspective of a group who work with adolescents, as classroom pupils and clients in counselling. The study investigated their opinions with regard to the potential application of My Career Chapter with adolescents in their teaching and counselling practices. Using a focus group, which followed training in My Career Chapter, the study elucidated four main themes, all indicative of alignment with the recommendations for the development of qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003).

The results were generally consistent with the previous study pertaining to counsellors of adult clients. However, the results of that previous study led to the question of whether My Career Chapter was appropriate for adolescents. The results of this study lend support to the suggestion that My Career Chapter is possibly suitable for some adolescent clients. To assert that it is appropriate for adolescents is unwarranted at this stage of its development as a career assessment and counselling procedure. Psychological-mindedness (i.e., the capacity to engage in abstract understanding of cognitive, behavioural, and emotional ideas) and developmental-readiness were raised as caveats to the tentative suggestion. Future research into My Career Chapter’s application in a young population of clients would need to take into account these possible moderating variables; which are equally relevant to an adult population.

The participants readily moved into a pedagogical mode of thought in bringing their suggestions for improving the capacity of My Career Chapter for class-room applications (e.g., breaking it into steps across classes). This is evidence of the participants’ genuine engagement in the focus group and attests to the study’s trustworthiness, particularly in reference to its authenticity (Morrow, 2005) and
transformative validity (Cho & Trent, 2006). Consistent with Morrow’s suggestion regarding multiple sources of data, the Group Monitor’s observation and notes secured this dimension of validity.

The current study’s trustworthiness could have been improved by the inclusion of a systematic search for opinions that may have been a source of contrary evidence that would challenge My Career Chapter’s compliance with the recommendations for qualitative assessment and counselling procedures. Unfortunately, logistical limitations on the focus group and conducting follow-up interviews with the participants were beyond the resources of this study. Follow-up interviews with participants after they had returned to their work environment would provide a further dimension of the critical appraisal of My Career Chapter.

The salience of personal meaning and the construction of a career identity in the contemporary world of work necessitates application of guidance procedures that facilitate adolescents’ construction of who they are and want to be (Guichard, 2005; Meijers, 2003). Accordingly, the constructivist, narrative approach to career counselling has emerged as a viable alternative to traditional methods of vocational guidance because of its emphasis upon meaning and identity (Patton & McMahon, 2006b). Notwithstanding the proven value of the traditional approaches to career development (e.g., person-environment fit), exemplars of narrative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon & Patton, 2003) demonstrate their relevance to contemporary guidance practice and the complexities of the educational and industrial environments in which adolescents make career-related decisions and educational choices.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that there may be potential for the development and application of My Career Chapter with an adolescent client population. It would likely require modification of its content so as to improve its
suitability for younger persons; and field testing would be necessary to guide that process. Furthermore, given the presence of the visual-spatial and graphical features of My System of Career Influences (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), it would be interesting to consider whether there is value in My Career Chapter being developed as a parallel form in its predominantly verbal and written approach to the elucidation of adolescents’ understanding of their systems of career influences, especially given the two procedures’ shared and explicit foundations in the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a).
CHAPTER EIGHT:
CLIENTS-USERS’ EXPERIENCE

It is axiomatic that there is a need to rigorously evaluate career development interventions (Athanasou, 2007; Bernes, Bardick, & Orr, 2007; Maguire, 2004; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004b; Plant, 2004; Watts, 1999; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002). Notwithstanding the importance of questions pertaining to high-level social and economic impacts of career development, there is a corpus of literature which presents evidence that individual career counselling is associated with positive outcomes for clients (Brown & McPartland, 2005; Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, & Walz, 1997; Swanson, 1995; Whiston & Oliver, 2005; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). For example, a longitudinal case study, using quantitative research methods, found that individual career counselling had a significant impact upon a client at 18-month and five-year follow-up (Kirschner, Hoffman, & Hill, 1994). Furthermore, a five-year longitudinal study, using qualitative research methods, has likewise found significant positive effects for clients at years one, two, and three (Bimrose & Barnes, 2006, 2007).

The client’s experience of the process of counselling, in general, has been the subject of considerable research (McLeod, 1990a; Mearns & Dryden, 1990), but it has been criticised for not addressing the subjectivity of the experience (Manthei, 2007). The case is somewhat different within the domain of vocational psychology and career development, in which, despite confidence that career counselling is effective, there is some way to go with respect to understanding the process of individual career counselling (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Dagley & Salter, 2004; Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Whiston & Oliver, 2005). Recent reviews certainly indicate a preponderance of
outcome research (Dagley & Salter, 2004; Guindon & Richmond, 2005). This state of affairs is not helped in any way by the subtle differences and overlap between the operational meanings of the terms *process* and *outcome*. The definitions used here will be taken from Hill and Williams (2000), as these have been adopted in the vocational psychology literature (Heppner & Heppner, 2003):

Process refers to overt and covert thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of both clients and therapists during therapy sessions. Process can be distinguished from input variables, extratherapy events, and outcome. Input variables involve characteristics of the clients and therapists (e.g., personality, demographics, expectations, theoretical orientation/worldview) and setting (e.g., physical arrangement of the room, agency vs. private practice). Extratherapy events occur outside therapy sessions and can help or hinder the therapeutic process, such as the death of a relative or having a good support system. Outcome refers to changes that occur directly or indirectly as a result of therapy, as measured in terms of immediate effects (e.g., the client response to specific therapist interventions), intermediate effects (e.g., change that occurs as a result of a therapeutic event of session), or distal effects (change that occurs as a result of an entire treatment). Process overlaps somewhat with these other variables (e.g., client insight can be both a process and an outcome); therefore the distinctions between variables are not clear cut (p. 670).

From that definition, and for the purpose of this research, the term *process* pertains to the clients’ and counsellors’ experience of counselling with respect to what each thought, felt, and did; whereas *outcome* pertains to their individual constructions of what transpired as a result of their experience of counselling. Both are addressed, but process is of particular interest.
Heppner and Heppner (2003) proffered an agenda for process research into career counselling. They identified the following issues:

1. Examining the working alliance and five promising counsellor techniques [interpretation, confrontation, self-disclosure, paradoxical intention, and encouraging client action].

2. Reconceptualising career counselling as a process of learning, and investigating the processes that lead to effective learning.

3. Investigating differences in career counselling process and outcome due to subtype membership, cultural perspectives, and other critical client attributes.

4. Investigating differences in career counselling process and outcome based on counsellors’ levels of self-efficacy, cultural perspectives, and other critical counsellor attributes.

5. Examining influential session events.

6. Utilising a common problem resolution metric for examining change across clients.

7. Examining client change longitudinally to examine stability of change and functional practicality of assessed outcomes.

8. Examining cognitive processes that may be mediating the career counselling process.

9. Developing molecular and global taxonomies of counsellor behaviours.

10. Utilizing advances in methodological approaches and statistical analyses (p. 429).

A single doctoral research project of this kind could not adequately address the entire agenda, nor present a full and comprehensive evaluation of outcome and process.
This present research project relates mainly to process, including influential session events, processes (not necessarily cognitive) that mediate the counselling, and advances in methodological approaches (not necessarily quantitative). In doing so, it includes an examination of two counselling interventions, or so-called “critical ingredients” that have been identified by Brown and Ryan-Krane (2000) as important contributors to client outcome: written exercises (e.g., journals, diaries, and workbooks) and individualised interpretation and feedback.

This chapter describes two studies which investigated client-users’ experiences of using My Career Chapter. Study 5 describes participants’ evaluation of a pilot version of My Career Chapter, which entailed the main body of the autobiographical procedure through which client-users write about their career using a sentence-completion process. Study 6 describes client-users’ experience of the full version of the procedure (shown in Appendix B) using an intensive examination of their experience through qualitative research.

**Study 5:**

Client-Users’ Reactions to the Sentence-Completion Task

*The Current Study*

What follows is a description of the construction of the pilot version of My Career Chapter and its evaluation by client-users. The pilot version was very much skeletal and was primarily established to assess the use of a sentence-completion dimension to the process of creating an autobiographical manuscript. The study\(^5\) presented hereafter is a report of clients’ reaction to using the pilot version.

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Method

Item Construction

The recommendations for developing qualitative career assessment procedures, espoused by McMahon, Patton, and Watson (2003) were used as a conceptual guide for the development of the initial version of My Career Chapter. My Career Chapter essentially required individuals to write about their career and life with regard to the wide range of influences identified by the STF. Rather than engaging clients in an open-ended writing exercise, the sentence-completion paradigm was chosen as a useful means of facilitating clients’ writing. Sentence-completion has been used to develop a measure of ego-identity in other discipline areas, most notably in the work of Loevinger (1985). In the work presented here, the concept of completing sentences as a form of projective technique was adapted. It was asserted that an individual would psychologically project onto a part-sentence those career issues most meaningful for them.

Each variable of the STF and others not included in the framework, but those believed to be important for personal understanding (e.g., emotional impact), were represented by a part sentence. There were 31 STF influences and three generic variables: Impact, Summary and The Future. Each variable had three partial sentences, summing to 102 items. For each variable, one sentence-part was present- or past-focused, one sentence was future-focused, and the final sentence addressed the valence of the variable through a rating (low, medium, high) of how the variable impacted upon careerlife. In the case of the influence Health, for example, the sentences were:

At the moment my health is …..

My health will …..
How healthy I am has a low/medium/high impact upon my careerlife because

…..

The part-sentences were derived from my recollections of common issues discussed in counselling sessions using the Career Systems Interview. Potential for bias was mitigated by making the parts as generic as possible. It should nevertheless be noted that a constructivist approach assumes that objectivity is unattainable and it consequently does not necessarily eschew bias. A social constructionist perspective requires an awareness, acceptance, and if necessary, deconstruction of one’s influence in any discursive process; and constructivist career counselling is no exception.

The Form

The nine-page form was entitled “My Career Future” and included a comprehensive set of instructions on the first page. The instructions were written to encourage the writer to be open and avoid prejudging his or her responses. The concept of the interconnectedness of variables of the career system was emphasised along with the importance of open exploration. This was reinforced by a modified graphical representation of an STF diagram (Patton & McMahon, 1999, p. 163). The modified version did not include the original diagrammatical elements for recursiveness, change over time, or chance; and included additional variables (e.g., dreams, self-confidence). Each item had sufficient space for the writer to fit a long sentence or to accommodate large handwriting. The form was printed in landscape format.

This initial study aimed to determine clients’ reactions to using the skeletal version of My Career Chapter, which essentially centred upon the writing about influences identified in the STF and the use of the sentence-completion paradigm.
Initial Trial

The items were initially tested with respect to how it felt to actually write the responses to them. The lists of items were completed by the three qualified career counsellors and by three non-client individuals who volunteered to test-run the items. Feedback from this process resulted in modifications to the items (e.g., shortening some sentence-parts because they were too prescriptive) and the process (e.g., including a diagram of a career system).

Participants

A State-registered psychologist, who worked in the Career Service at the University of Southern Queensland and who was trained in the application of My Career Chapter, collaborated in this study and selected the participants. Individuals who demonstrated high levels of career-related anxiety and seeking urgent attention at triage were excluded and referred to standard career counselling services. Twenty-two adult clients of the Career Service of the University of Southern Queensland voluntarily participated in the evaluation process. The counselling services of the university are free of charge. The mean age was 22.86 years, 14 were female and eight were male. All but three were undergraduate students. All of the participants’ first language was English.

Measures

Client Reactions System Questionnaire. The Client Reactions System (CRS) (Hill, Helms, Spiegel, & Tichenor, 1988) was used in this study. This scale was developed to assess clients’ reactions to therapist interventions. The scale contains fourteen positive reactions (e.g., I felt understood, or hopeful) and seven negative reactions (e.g., worse, confused). Clients were instructed to rate their level of
agreement using a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

*Clients Constructions of Change Scale.* The Clients Constructions of Change Scale (CCCS) (Dumka, Sprenkle, & Martin, 1995) was modified for use in this study. The CCCS was developed to measure clients’ perception of their counselling experience. The scale measures four constructs - *outcome optimism*, *perceived progress*, *self-agency*, and *effort and persistence*. The scale consists of sixteen items with four items per construct subscale. Clients were instructed to rate their level of agreement using a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Dumka et al. reported Chronbach’s alpha indices as .81 for *outcome optimism*, .88 for *perceived progress*, .81 for *self-agency*, and .84 for *effort and persistence*. The CCCS items were modified slightly to suit the context of career counselling, as opposed to the original scale’s context of clinical counselling. For example, the term “career counselling” was inserted in place of “counselling” where appropriate. There were no obvious contextual or meaning related anomalies in making these changes.

*Procedure*

Exigencies of the environment in which it was conducted (i.e., a university careers service) necessitated the adoption of a quantitative design. A one-shot case study design was implemented. The Careers Service operates a “drop-in” session in which clients’ concerns are screened in terms of the presenting issues and needs. This triage process results in some clients being given information only, whereas others may be referred to alternative agencies, and some could be referred into the career counselling service. Due to the constraints of offering, and, moreover not withholding, counselling services to potential clients, the participants were not randomly selected.
Those clients appropriate for career counselling were invited to take part in the trial; and hence they represented a convenience sample rather than a true random sample.

Allocation to one of the three counsellors was based upon their availability.

At the end of the drop-in screening interview, the participants were invited to complete the My Career Chapter exercise and return with it at their scheduled full career counselling appointment. They were presented a brief, standardised rationale that their career concerns related to a system of influences—at this point a diagram of the STF was shown—and that it may be helpful to write about their system of influences. They were instructed to read the guidelines and complete the My Career Chapter. They were instructed to complete the evaluation schedules, CRS and CCCS, immediately following their completion of the written exercise. Immediately completing the evaluation schedules was required to mitigate the potential effects of intervening influences. Instructions specifically guided the individuals to rate their experiences of completing the written work, and to exclude their experiences of the drop-in screening interview. The schedules were to be given to the receptionist upon return for their counselling appointment.

Results

There were no missing data. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the variables were converted to a z-statistic (Tabachnick & Fiddell, 1989). This analysis indicated that there was no significant skewness or kurtosis. Outlier screening indicated that there were two cases whose scores on the CCCS subscales were markedly lower than those of other cases. Though their scores depressed the average scores somewhat, these cases’ data were nevertheless retained in the dataset for the overall statistical analysis.

Participants’ scores on the CRS for positive reactions and negative reactions are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. All mean scores of the positive variables were
more than four (i.e., neither agree nor disagree). The mean scores for the variables
understood, supported, hopeful, relief, clear, and educated were rated between slightly
agree to agree. These results indicated a mild positive reaction to completing the pilot
version of My Career Chapter. Means for the negative reactions were all between
ratings of two and four with a trend toward a rating of slightly disagree to disagree.
These results indicated that there was no evidence of an overall negative reaction to
completing the My Career Chapter exercise.
Table 3

*Mean Scores for Positive Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 22)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>6.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of negative thoughts/behaviours</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>5.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better self-understanding</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of feelings</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>5.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstuck</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New perspective</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ways to behave</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Mean Scores for Negative Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 22)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>95% Confidence Limits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of direction</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reaction</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean scores for the CCCS subscales are presented in Table 5. The alpha coefficients were .63 for *outcome optimism*, .66 for *self-agency*, .69 for *perceived progress*, and .76 for *effort and persistence*. These coefficients were less than those reported by Dumka et al. (1995); however they were taken to indicate that the scales had acceptable reliability for the purposes of an exploratory study in accordance with Streiner’s (2003) suggestions. The subscales *outcome optimism, self-agency, and effort and persistence*, all showed a rating between *slightly agree to agree*. The subscale *perceived progress* was rated between *neither agree nor disagree to slightly agree*. Taken together, these results indicated a mild positive account across three subscales, and an equivocal or neutral positive outcome for progress.
Table 5

Mean Scores for the Client Construction of Change Scale (N = 22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome optimism</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-agency</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived progress</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort and persistence</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Constructivist approaches to career development offer a fresh paradigm for the practice of career counselling. Under this aegis I sought to develop further narrative and systems models by constructing a career counselling technique that facilitated clients’ self-exploration of their career system. Moreover, I sought to establish the reactions clients felt immediately after, and in response to, completing an assessment process based upon a sentence-completion procedure.

The CRS (Hill et al., 1988) furnishes a measure of clients’ positive and negative emotional reactions. The positive emotional variables understood, supported, hopeful, relief, clear, and educated were most frequently endorsed. All of the remaining positive variables fell within the mid-range and certainly none was within the range of being absent (which would have been indicated by ratings of disagreement). This result was interpreted as meaning that clients experienced a mild positive emotional state in reaction to the completion of the tool. Although a positive state is encouraging, the results in relation to negative emotions indicated that the process did no harm. The ratings on negative emotional variables were in the range of disagreement, that is, clients were not experiencing a negative emotion in reaction to the completion process.
In summary, the outcomes on the CRS indicate that the completion process is not emotionally offensive to clients.

The CCCS (Dumka et al., 1995) was modified for the purposes of this study by changing the content of items to reflect career counselling, as distinct from the original schedule, which related to clinical counselling. The alpha coefficients reported here indicate that the modified CCCS had acceptable reliability. It is not unlikely that the relatively small sample size had an impact upon the coefficients. Nevertheless, we have taken to cautiously view the results as interpretable. It was not surprising to find that perceived progress was the lowest of the three subscales. Given that clients had only just commenced the career counselling experience it would be unlikely that they would indicate a sudden change in their movement toward an improved career status. The results on the subscales outcome optimism, self-agency, and effort and persistence were encouraging; it was interpreted as indicating that the experience may have positively generated a sense of hope and enthusiasm for the career exploration process upon which clients had embarked.

Although the natural contingencies of the setting in which this evaluation was completed did not allow for the operation of an experimental design, it is asserted that the explicit instructions to clients—that they should immediately rate their reactions specifically toward the tool and completion process—secured the validity of the results. Notwithstanding the caveat on the design, the results indicate that the process of completing the test version of My Career Chapter was not offensive or negative and therefore did not place clients at risk of psychological harm. Moreover, the results offer initial evidence that the experience of writing My Career Chapter was on average a positive one that enhanced their positive expectations of career exploration.
It was concluded that the manuscript-only pilot version of My Career Chapter would benefit from further development and refinement so that it better related to theory (i.e., theory of dialogical self). As working models for the assessment of dialogical self, the *Self-confrontation Method* and *Personal Position Repertoire* and *Personality Web* present a number of implications for My Career Chapter. The first implication is that the construction of part-sentences by clients may be conceived as equivalent to the *valuations* constructed in the Self-confrontation Method because their construction by the client involves open-ended evaluations of influences and consideration of their impact. A significant difference, however, is that My Career Chapter does not contain an item for each time perspective of past, present, and future: past and present vary throughout. The lack of emotional content in My Career Chapter was criticised earlier in this report and stands as the second implication. In contrast, the Self-confrontation Method entails explicit rating of affect in relation to a client’s valuations. The same emphasis upon emotion is transferred to My Career Chapter in this study toward its purposeful reformulation. The Personal Position Repertoire facilitates clients’ awareness of their potential I-positions. This is a crucial aspect of counselling work using the theory of dialogical self. The matrix method of the Personal Position Repertoire presented a instructive model upon which a means to facilitate clients’ exploration of Systems Theory Framework (STF) influences upon one another could be constructed; thereby establishing a process in which different STF influences are viewed as potential locations for I-positions and the compatibility amongst them examined. The *Personality Web* pioneers an alternative means of assessing dialogical self; one that is not theoretically tethered to valuation theory. It also demonstrates the potential for written materials in the assessment process.
My Career Chapter was designed to be a process through which an individual would consider a wide range of the influences present within his or her life and in reference to career; purportedly de-centring and contextualising the self. With respect to administration, the client completed two sentence-parts that represented the influences present in his or her life and described in the systems theory framework and then rated the impact of the influence upon his or her careerlife. Notwithstanding the evidence of a positive impact upon clients who completed the original version of My Career Chapter, which was administered in isolation from other assessment and counselling processes in the format of a quasi-experimental design, the technique lacked emotional content; presenting only one set of items addressing emotional impact. Moreover, the skeletal version lacked an extensive integration with theory. To address these criticisms, the further development and modification of My Career Chapter adapted the Theory of Dialogical Self in order to enhance the technique’s alignment with same, and its alignment with narrative career counselling broadly. These modifications are presented here.

Core features and modifications

Emotion. A major component of My Career Chapter was the addition of items that aimed to facilitate clients’ understanding of their emotions in relationship to their career influences. Using a five-point scale, the item read: “I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my [influence] because…..”. Despite the revision of the pilot form to include an emotional dimension for each influence, the original items pertaining to Emotional Impact were retained and changed slightly so that the text alluded to a generalised Emotional State during the prior weeks, for the current state, and for the desired state.
Three Time Dimensions. The pilot version was significantly reconfigured so that the item-set for each Influence included one additional item (i.e., part-sentence) for the three time dimensions past, present, and future. The item pertaining to impact was modified to bring its scale in line with that for emotion (i.e., five-point) as opposed to the original three-point scale of low, medium, and high. A number of minor modifications were also completed. The item-sets for some Influences were merged for sake of convenience of expression and meaning (i.e., Skills and Abilities; Health and Disabilities; Political Decisions; Historical Trends; and Globalization). New Influences that were included in My Career Chapter, but not present in the STF were Dreams and Aspirations and Emotional State. The cover page and instructions were modified to accommodate the new processes.

Spatial Awareness. Another major addition to the pilot version was designed to facilitate awareness of how career influences related to one another and thus to allow progress toward understanding different I-positions. The personal position repertoire provided a conceptual model upon which to conceive the Matrix of Career Influences: in essence, this was the idea that I-positions relate to one another at various intensities—juxtaposed or opposed. In an operational sense, this meant the construction of a grid matrix so that influences could be placed adjacent to one another. Two matrices were constructed: one for comparing external and internal influences and another for comparing internal influences with one another. The external influences described in the systems theory framework were positioned in a matrix on the y-axis and the internal influences on the x-axis. A five-point bipolar rating scale was devised to determine a client’s evaluations with respect to compatibility and incompatibility. An individual would rate two influences with respect to their relative compatibility using a five point scale ranging from a score of positive 2, which indicated high compatibility, through to
a score of negative 2, which meant high incompatibility: +2 = highly compatible; +1 = mildly compatible; 0 = neither or neutral; -1 = mildly incompatible; and -2 = highly incompatible.

Following completion of the matrices of influences and emotional analysis, clients would be required to return to the sentence-completion process for the Summary of Themes. The original item-sets for Summary were subsumed under this section and included item-sets for Strengths, Obstacles, and The Future, following the same time dimension and impact configurations as the main writing tasks.

Chronotope Conversations. The final revision of the pilot version of My Career Chapter was not so much the development of a writing process, but rather the development of a counselling process that would be implemented in a follow-up interview. This process was construed as the final process toward co-construction of dialogical self. The client would speak, in the counselling setting, his or her Summary of Themes to his or her imagined self in the past and future. Upon doing this he or she would construct a response to him or herself which emanated from that imagined self. Finally they would construct a response in reply—an imagined dialogue with oneself. This three-step process was demonstrated to be a powerful process toward meaning (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Study 6:

Client-Users’ Reactions to the Complete Version

Thus far in this research project, a pilot version of the manuscript component of My Career Chapter has been tested by client-users (in Study 5); and counsellor-users have tested the full and complete version (in Studies 3 and 4). Reflexive studies of the
developer’s experience have also been reported. What remains to be reported is client-users’ experience of the full and complete version of My Career Chapter.

The Current Study

In this final study into My Career Chapter, the experience of an adult client-user group was investigated. Having tested for clients’ reactions to the pilot version, and finding no concerning evidence of negative reactions and a mild positive reaction to completing the manuscript section of My Career Chapter, the current study sought to investigate client-users’ experiences in more psychological depth than was possible in the previous study, as well as clients’ reactions to the full version. Given the results of previous studies with counsellor-users which highlighted possible issues with users’ verbal ability and limitations associated with the complexity of the process (particularly the compatibility matrix), these features were kept in focus throughout.

Method

Assumptions

This study was constructivist in ontology and epistemology. It sought both to understand both the unique experiences of client-users and to attempt to synthesise their experiences into a composite meaningful account. Accordingly, a phenomenological research design was chosen for that purpose.

Research Design

This study deployed a concurrent nested mixed method design with priority given to qualitative data over quantitative data (i.e., QUAL+quan) (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). As with Study 3, the current study used the qualitative research method Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003) to capture the unique experiences of the client-users. IPA is phenomenological and hermeneutic in theoretical origin and
aims to facilitate understanding of how individuals make sense of their psychosocial worlds, experiences, and events. Application of IPA in this study aimed to explore client-users’ experience of My Career Chapter with respect to their working through each of the steps in the booklet; writing and reading their manuscript, and then hearing their manuscript being read back to them by a counsellor in the interpretive follow-up session. The interview data and IPA were supplemented by quantitative rating scale data derived from a semi-structured interview schedule, Helpful Aspects of Therapy, and a questionnaire, Client Reactions System, both of which are described below in the sources of data.

Researcher-as-Instrument Statement

As the primary developer of My Career Chapter, my own appraisal of it has been accounted for through autoethnographic writing, personal application of the procedure, and application in counselling. This study was conceived out of my desire to understand the experience of client-users, with a view to inform modifications or improvements to its composition.

Participants

A State-registered psychologist, who worked in the Career Service at the University of Southern Queensland and who was trained in the application of My Career Chapter, collaborated in this study by selecting the participants for the study and by meeting in a session with the participants for the reading and interpretation process. Individuals who demonstrated high levels of career-related anxiety and sought urgent attention at triage were excluded and referred to standard career counselling services. IPA requires small, homogenous samples with their homogeneity being theoretically or purposefully defined without the criterion of generalisability (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As My Career Chapter was originally configured in the field for a particular population
of clients (i.e., adults with relatively high English verbal ability), *purposive selection* (Polkinghorne, 2005) was used for this study. Thus, participants were limited to: (a) Adults; (b) seeking a career exploration experience; (c) whose level of post-secondary education was of at least undergraduate level; and (d) whose first language was English. There were seven participants, with ages ranging from 24 to 62 years, six female and one male. All but one had completed an undergraduate bachelor-level degree, with one participant having taken leave from her senior years of undergraduate study for the birth of her child.

*Sources of data*

Participants completed My Career Chapter in their own time and then returned for a one hour follow-up session with the counsellor, in which their manuscript was read by the counsellor and interpreted co-constructively. Approximately one week after their sessions with the counsellor, participants were interviewed in a one hour session with the researcher. The interviews followed a semi-structured format to elicit the users’ experience of completing My Career Chapter and of the reading and interpretive session with the counsellor. Following IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2003), the interviews entailed semi-structured protocols. Interviews were electronically recorded and professionally transcribed. Two semi-structured interview schedules were used for this procedure, and these were followed by a print questionnaire.

*Client Experience of MCC Interview.* The first interview schedule was formulated specifically for this study. The items covered participants’ experience overall and then specifically with each step of the process of completing My Career Chapter. This set of questions was supplemented with the personal items from the bank of reflective questions in the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (McMahon & Patton, 2006b, p. 106). Similar to the questions used in Study 2, they pertained to
constructivist notions of connectedness, reflection, meaning-making, learning, and agency. Unlike Study 2, only the personal questions were used, as the professional questions were to relevant to the client-users.

**Helpful Aspects of Therapy Interview.** This interview schedule was adapted from the original version (Llewelyn, 1988) and an online version (Elliot, 1993). This open-ended semi-structured questionnaire has been used in counselling and psychotherapy process research and is completed by clients at the end of their session with the counsellor. Clients are asked to describe the most helpful event in their session with the counsellor and to rate its helpfulness using a simple Likert-scale ranging from 1 = extremely hindering to 9 = extremely helpful. In addition, clients are also asked to describe an event that was unhelpful or hindering. In this study, clients were invited to describe any experience in the writing, reading, or interpretation processes of My Career Chapter that was helpful or unhelpful. The original schedule was modified to include wording referring to My Career Chapter and career-related issues.

**Client Reactions System Questionnaire.** Following the close of the interviews, the participants’ reactions to My Career Chapter were recorded using the Client Reactions System (CRS) (Hill, Helms, Spiegel, & Tichenor, 1988), as was used for Study 5. The instructions were modified to suit the study with reference to thinking about their experience of writing, reading, and hearing their My Career Chapter. The scale contains fourteen positive reactions (e.g., I felt understood, or hopeful) and seven negative reactions (e.g., worse, confused). Participants were instructed to rate their level of agreement using a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. This questionnaire was used firstly to triangulate the qualitative interview data and secondly to make another check to ensure that participants, as client-users of My Career Chapter, were not adversely affected.
Data analysis

Six transcripts were analysed using IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Due to technical failure, only the last half of one participant’s interview was properly recorded; and consequently only the handwritten notes on the Helpful Aspects of Therapy Interview form and Client Reactions System Questionnaire were retained as data for a check of saturation and trustworthiness.

The same process of interpretative phenomenological analysis used in Study 3 was deployed for the current analysis of data (and the reader may now opt to move onto reading the Results section). Prior to commencing the analysis, the transcripts were read while listening to the audio recording, so as to refresh, note transcript omissions or errors, and to actively re-engage with the dialogue of the interviews. The initial step of IPA entailed repeatedly reading through one interview transcript before working through any of the others. In the recommended procedure for IPA, notes are recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript during the first reading. Rather than write in the margins, in this study the comments were written on each transcript using word-processing editing and comments features. These notes indicated specific experiences revealed in the text. Upon completing this pass of the transcript, the transcript was read again, taking into account the initial notes and entering themes that subsumed the notes. This thematic level of analysis was conceptually higher than that of the first and aimed to create psychological understandings of the text, which were grounded in an individual’s interview, yet sufficiently abstract to allow for connection with the themes from other cases. The themes were then listed at the bottom of the transcript and reviewed to determine conceptual clusters, which were subsequently checked against the raw transcript for meaningfulness. Text which was indicative of clusters’ and themes’ meanings was retained for exemplification. The entire process was repeated for
each individual transcript. Thus each individual’s transcript was analysed idiographically so as to create a full account of his or her experience. Following the iterative procedure performed on each case, a final list of themes and superordinate clusters was constructed so as to indicate the aggregated meanings from the group. This interpretative process entailed repeatedly moving back and forth across the participants’ themes and checking if themes were conceptually related to a superordinate cluster. This list was used to enable a thematic reporting of results.

Trustworthiness. A check was made to assure trustworthiness of the data and the analysis according to the paradigm-specific requirements for constructivist research (Morrow, 2005). Whilst the data saturated relatively early in the analysis, care was taken to abduct negative evidence and discrepancy within the data to ensure a balance of participants’ experiences and to satisfy the criterion of fairness. Accordingly, whenever appropriate, divergent views have been presented in the results section. The criterion of ontological authenticity requires that participants’ data be expanded and elaborated. This requirement was satisfied as an inherent part of the IPA interview process, in which their experiences were elaborated to the point of shared understanding with the interviewer. Educative authenticity was satisfied through individual discussions with the participants regarding how they learned through completing My Career Chapter and participating in the reflective process. Catalytic authenticity pertains to action which is stimulated by the research process and this is covered in the Discussion. Morrow’s criteria pertaining to meaning, especially shared meaning, were satisfied through the process of the participants being able to confirm their transcripts and the themes derived from them. It should be noted, however, IPA does not require the final interpretation to be a shared construction, as it ultimately represents meanings generated and owned by the researcher, rather than the participants.
In this study, the quantitative results derived from the Helpful Aspects of Therapy and Client Reactions Systems questionnaire were primarily interpreted idiomatically alongside each participant’s interview transcript. Nevertheless, the Likert-scale data were summarised nomothetically to act as a supplementary source of data for the purposes of triangulation and establishing a further indicator of saturation and trustworthiness.

Results

The IPA derived four superordinate clusters from the participants’ interview transcripts: instructions and guidelines, induction of contemplation and self-reflection, interpretation, and positive experience. These clusters are described first and then supplemented by the results of the quantitative measures of helpful aspects and reactions.

Instructions and Guidelines

Notwithstanding participants’ completion of My Career Chapter without major concerns, there was a consistency in themes around the instructions and guidelines for completing the procedure. Participants indicated that the instructions should be simplified and enhanced to enable them to comprehend fully what was to be undertaken. The need for instructional clarity was best exemplified in some participants feeling somewhat confused with complex components, most particularly with the Step 3 compatibility task in which career influences are compared/contrasted in a matrix using a rating scale. One participant recommended presentation of the STF figure, used in Step 2, in colour so as to improve ease of use.

Induction of Contemplation and Self-reflection

The participants uniformly described how procedural structure of My Career Chapter induced contemplation and reflection upon their career. The contemplation was
attributed to the step-wise approach and the specific tasks and procedures. With respect to the overall experience of My Career Chapter, one participant indicated that it was enjoyable because it served as a lifelong reflection, and stated:

Tracking through what I’ve done in my life and thinking about what I might have done differently if I’d been going through study now, and that sort of thing, and starting out (Participant 2).

With respect to the specific procedural elements of My Career Chapter, the sentence-stem procedure in the manuscript was deemed useful as a structure. One participant stated:

It sort of, as I said before, makes you take stock of where you’ve been, what you are now, and things in the future, which sometimes you don’t do. (Participant 6)

It was evident that participants were conscious of reflecting upon aspects of life that they would not ordinarily associated with career, but as being personal (e.g., relationships). There was no evidence that this was taken as impertinent or offensive, but seemed to be taken as surprising that career would extend beyond work-related topics and that personal life would likewise extend into the domain of career. Having heard her story read out by the counsellor, one participant felt affirmed that she prioritised her family, but was interested to realise how it touched on her career:

I know how strong my family ethics are, I kind of knew, but I didn’t realise it was coming out in other spots, so that was interesting (Participant 1).

**Hearing and Interpretation**

Participants uniformly expressed joy, pleasure, or satisfaction, in hearing their manuscripts being read by the counsellor in the follow-up session. It was evident that the participants felt personally moved by hearing their stories read aloud and being
focused upon so intensely. The breadth of the storying of the person’s whole life was also emotively potent; for example:

I found it a little bit, not embarrassing, I guess it was a little bit, just because you’re looking at all aspects of your life (Participant 5)

This participant was not perturbed by the emotional intensity, but somewhat surprised that a career counselling experience could be so. The reading aloud and hearing of the manuscript also contributed to participants’ “making sense” of their stories; for example:

It made a lot more sense when she [the counsellor] read it than when I was reading it. Well, actually, it sounded like a story; and it sort of, because I was sitting and listening to it, things were clicking into place (Participant 3).

Positive Experience

Despite their minor troubles with some aspects of the procedure, participants described the overall experience as positive and one from which they felt they had learned something new or had something experientially re-affirmed.

Helpful Aspects

In the Helpful Aspects of Therapy questionnaire, participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of a particular experience. As revealed in the IPA, the participants identified the reading and interpretation process as the most helpful, with others emphasising the reflective experience as the most helpful. The aggregate mean rating score for the helpfulness of the experiences was $M = 8.00 \ (SD = .50, \ N = 7)$, which is indicated descriptively as greatly helpful on the Likert-scale. Although not rated as hindering by the participants, the compatibility matrix was highlighted for its complexity in procedure. This result aligns with those derived from the IPA.
Participant Reactions

The participants’ positive and negative reactions to My Career Chapter are respectively summarised in Tables 6 and 7. The mean scores for each item of the Client Reactions System indicate that the participants generally felt positive about the experience of completing My Career Chapter. Moreover, the mean score for the items on the negative scale indicated that there was no evidence of a general negative reaction to the procedure. The higher individual scores on items pertaining to being confused, having a lack of direction, or feeling stuck, were clarified with individuals and attributed to concerns with the instructions and guidelines, as revealed in the IPA. All scores for feeling worse fell within the neutral to strongly disagree range; clearly indicative of no emotional deterioration as a result of the procedure. The one participant who endorsed feeling scared attributed this to her concerns about revealing her personal life to the counsellor, but was able to confirm that this was an initial reaction of apprehension, rather than a serious problem with the experience overall.
### Table 6

**Scores for Positive Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Understood</td>
<td>6.29</td>
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<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>6.08</td>
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<td>Relief</td>
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<td>1.36</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
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<td>Aware of negative thoughts/behaviours</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
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<td>Better self-understanding</td>
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<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstuck</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New perspective</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ways to behave</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Scores for Negative Reactions on the Client Reactions System (N = 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of direction</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reaction</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This study sought to explore client-users’ experiences of My Career Chapter, inclusive of the writing, reading, and interpretation processes. As such, this study contributes to the literature on clients’ experience of career assessment and counselling, particularly in reference to process variables (Heppner & Heppner, 2003) and the critical ingredients of written exercises and individualised interpretation (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000). The study found that participants not only enjoyed most aspects of completing My Career Chapter, but actually got something out of it with respect to enhancing or developing their self-awareness of careers, particularly in relation to the systems formulation of career which includes interpersonal, social, and societal influences (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). In addition to affirming the value of written exercises and individual interpretation, this outcome pertains to the finding by Brown and Ryan Krane that building support within social networks forms an important component of the career counselling experience. Accordingly, client-users who have been made more aware of the broader social influences of career may be in a better psychological position to engage in social processes of career development, such as
networking, under the guidance of the counsellor. Participants’ hearing their stories was a significant highlight for them personally. Whilst the results affirm the value of the reading and hearing procedure of My Career Chapter, they also implicate the importance of the client-counsellor working alliance, and the clinical sensitivity required in this approach to career assessment and counselling, which is a critical process identified by Heppner and Heppner and other scholars (Meara & Patton, 1994; Whiston & Oliver, 2005). In accordance with research indicating that the involvement of a counsellor in an intervention significantly adds to its effectiveness (Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003), this study highlights the importance of the co-construction in interpretation and, therefore, the crucial role of the counsellor. Furthermore, the nexus of contemplating-writing-reading-hearing-reflecting, being experienced by client-users as effective, gives tentative evidence toward the claim by Heppner and Heppner that career counselling could be conceptualised as a learning process. Moreover, the client-to-self and client-to-counsellor processes reflect the notions of dialogical self, with clients generating dialogue amongst I-positions—internal and external.

Consistent with the results of Study 5, participants’ reactions to the procedure did not raise significant concerns in relation to its being experienced as threatening, distressing, or harmful. This is an important research outcome, as it assures with some confidence that My Career Chapter is not clinically dangerous, and that it may be applied, with due caution, for counselling or research purposes. The most significant negative feature revealed by the study was the need to revisit the instructions and the guidelines for completing My Career Chapter, with the aim of making them clearer and simpler. Whilst no major negative effects were revealed, this study contributes to a relatively limited literature on the negative effects of career assessment and counselling
(see Whiston & Oliver, 2005) through the specific application of the Client Reactions Systems questionnaire and the Helpful Aspects of Therapy and searching questions within the semi-structured interview.

There is limited evidence of difference in the outcome of career counselling when gender is considered (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Whiston & Oliver, 2005). Indeed, the current study did not seek to investigate the differences between males’ and females’ experience of My Career Chapter: after all, purposive selection of participants stipulated age, education, and language ability as the primary selection criteria. Nevertheless, the study may be criticised for not fully explicating a gender-balanced view in its recruitment of relatively fewer males. Whilst methodologically such a criticism is unwarranted—with respect to IPA’s requirement for purposive selection—it is an enticing prospect to consider that women and men may differ in how they experience the procedure, particularly the expressive phase in the reading and interpretation with a counsellor.

In conclusion, using a qualitative research method (viz., IPA) in combination with triangulating quantitative data, this study provides evidence that My Career Chapter is a career assessment and counselling procedure that is generally enjoyed by client-users, and one that assists in the generation of insightful understanding of career. Notwithstanding its procedural strengths, there remains scope to improve its instructions and guidelines. Given the dearth of empirical studies pertaining to narrative career assessment and counselling procedures, this study makes a contribution to the literature with respect to evaluating a theoretically-informed narrative procedure in the field and for gaining an understanding of its process and impact upon client-users.
CHAPTER NINE:
DISCUSSION

_Not too deep._ People who comprehend a matter in all its depth seldom remain true to it forever. For they have brought its depths to the light; and then there is always much to see about it that is bad (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 235).

Recapitulation and Outcomes

This dissertation reports on a doctoral research project which investigated the constructivist, narrative career assessment and counselling procedure _My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography_. The research project explicitly set out to explore the _process_ of using and experiencing _My Career Chapter_, in the context of previous process-oriented research (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Swanson, 1995; Whiston & Oliver, 2005); concerns about the lack of process research (Dagley & Salter, 2004; Guindon & Richmond, 2005); and in reference to Heppner’s and Heppner’s (2003) agenda for research into the process of career counselling. As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, it would be unlikely that a single and specific research project such as this could do justice to the need for a full and comprehensive evaluation of _My Career Chapter_. The six studies of this research endeavour set out to answer the following questions:

1. How was _My Career Chapter_ developed and experienced by its author?
2. How do client-users experience _My Career Chapter_ in career counselling?
3. How do counsellor-users experience _My Career Chapter_?

In order to answer those questions, the research project entailed an overview of pertinent ontological and epistemological frameworks and paradigms for psychological
science (viz., contextualism, constructivism, and social constructionism), along with constructivist, narrative approaches to career counselling. The project initially presented My Career Chapter as an alternative procedure for narrative career counselling, yet one in need of intensive process oriented research, so as to inform practice and address issues of theory.

Toward that end, six studies were reported in this dissertation. The studies focused on the experience of the primary developer of the procedure (through Studies 1 and 2), counsellor-users trained in its application (through Studies 3 and 4), and client-users who experienced My Career Chapter as a career counselling intervention (through Studies 5 and 6). For the sake of clarity, the studies have been summarised in the following three paragraphs.

Studies 1 and 2 provided the organic basis of My Career Chapter’s relationship to constructivism, and the historicisation and contextualisation of its development. By doing so, those studies also reflexively brought into the question the professional, socio-political entity of scientist-practitioner in vocational psychology (and the inherently subsumed entities of psychologist and career development practitioner). Those autoethnographic case studies brought a reflective view to the entire research project, so as to enable high level compliance with the principles of constructivist, qualitative research. The studies pushed my engagement with the research project to a further degree of reflexivity by drawing on me as a source of experiential data to check the veracity of my claims about My Career Chapter’s qualities as an assessment and counselling procedure.

Studies 3 and 4 investigated professional counsellor-users’ experience of My Career Chapter. In contrast to Studies 1 and 2, these studies presented an objectified and critical account of My Career Chapter’s relationship to theory and the
recommendations for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003), from the counsellor-users’ perspectives. The counsellors’ opinions affirmed My Career Chapter’s alignment with those recommendations. Furthermore, the studies fully engaged the participants to an extent that they were able to offer suggestions for the modification of My Career Chapter to enable its application in career counselling work.

Studies 5 and 6 investigated clients-users’ experience of My Career Chapter. Study 5 pilot tested the sentence-completion section of the procedure and found that clients experienced no significant negative reactions, thus providing an important body of evidence that the procedure presented low psychological risk. Moreover, Study 5 found that there was a mild positive emotional reaction to completing the task, along with tentative evidence of clients’ tending toward positive change with respect to career counselling. This study also revealed areas in which the procedure could be improved. Study 6 investigated clients’ experience of the full version of My Career Chapter. Results of this intensive study indicated that client-users were able to use My Career Chapter as a reflective procedure with positive impact upon their emotional state and self-awareness. The study also confirmed that My Career Chapter presented no significant risk of psychological harm to client-users.

The following sections of this final and general discussion section of the dissertation overview the research project’s implications for theory and practice. It commences with a commentary on issues pertaining to the research designs, reporting, limitations, and potential, and then surveys My Career Chapter with respect to ethical dimensions, its alignments with standards, and interesting possibilities. Finally, the chapter sets forth propositions for the integration of the Theory of Dialogical Self into the STF and the Theory of Career Construction; and as propositions, they are presented
in the spirit of theoretical convergence of counselling and career development theories and practices (cf. Savickas, 1995b; Savickas & Lent, 1994).

Commentary on Research

Research Designs and Reporting

This research project was primarily derived from a constructivist paradigm (Morrow, 2005, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) for the psychology of career development (Patton & McMahon, 2006c; Young & Collin, 2004). Though there was an element of mixed-method research (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) (i.e., in the overall inclusion and interpretation of the results of Study 5 and the research design of Study 6), and critical-ideological use of literature (Haverkamp & Young, 2007) in the Parenthetic Considerations and autoethnographic studies (1 and 2), the empirical research designs and interpretation of the accumulated data, were, on the whole, constructivist in orientation.

As others have argued (Borgen, 1995; Kelle, 2006; Mason, 2006), mixing qualitative methods and quantitative methods is not necessarily antithetic to laudable constructivist research, rather it is how the studies are integrated into the overall qualitative research endeavour that ensures rigour and substantiation. This research project has effectively drawn together a number of studies using a range of research designs, all under the aegis of constructivism. Whilst Study 5 was quantitative in design, it was subsumed into the broader research outcomes and interpreted from the perspective of constructivism; and thus it engaged the notion of mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way (Mason, 2006). Study 6 was avowedly QUAL+quan mixed method using the concurrent nested design (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005), emphasising qualitative data over the quantitative; using them as a
supplement and for triangulation. The results were nevertheless used and interpreted in a constructivist framework.

A significant achievement of this research project is the articulation of two research methods into the career development literature: autoethnography and interpretative phenomenological analysis. In a comprehensive review of the mainstream psychology and career development literature, I found no explicit evidence of these methods. Whilst application of the research designs may be a risk with respect to not taking a sure and well trod path for doctoral research, the choice of designs was appropriate with respect to the research questions—indeed, the whole decision of design choice is key to the conduct of qualitative research (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Kwong Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Blind reviews of the manuscripts which described studies using interpretative phenomenological analysis and autoethnography, certainly indicate willingness in the field for their accession to the research literature; which, incidentally, throws into relief the criticism of institutional review boards’ scepticism of qualitative research (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004).

Qualitative research is challenging the discipline of psychology, yet is expanding the discipline’s methodological imagination (Fine, 2007). Part of the challenge to the discipline is recognising that one’s self is an inherent dimension of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005; Yeh & Inman, 2007). Preparation of the autoethnographies enabled me to make sense of the entire research project: and reflexively (Aron, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Parker, 2004; Schön, 1983) and autobiographically (Baumeister & Newman, 1994) bring science and practice together (Murdock, 2006); and achieve a level of ethical transparency (Haverkamp, 2005) to enable the critical reader’s evaluation of the research project. Kidd’s (1998b, 2004)
criticism of the field of career development for its lack of emotion in theory is apposite. Kidd asked of constructivist research: “How can we make sense of and understand what is going on? What is the researcher’s role in the process of sense-making?” (2004, p. 446). Kidd’s questions lead one to consider and then to explicate the positioning of the scientist-practitioner as a source of emotive influence in theory, research, and practice. Thus, the autoethnographies of this research project demonstrate how theorising and research can include the scientist-practitioner in the dynamic mix of theory, research and practice.

Phenomenological studies, in general, have minimally constituted the body of counselling research literature of recent decades (Berrios & Lucca, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Whilst other phenomenological methods could have been deployed to investigate counsellors’ and clients’ experiences of My Career Chapter, the accessibility and semi-structured process of interpretative phenomenological analysis were paramount in its selection as the method of choice. Moreover, the natural constraint of the research setting (i.e., a counselling service), necessitated the adoption of a research method that would be successful with relatively small and concentrated samples of participants.

The Studies in the dissertation also represent an operationalisation of the recommendations for reporting qualitative research (see Morrow, 2005) and concomitantly align with recently published recommendations (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). A crucial feature of Morrow’s recommendations is the explicit requirement of the researcher to present himself or herself as the researcher-as-instrument and an active participant in the research endeavour itself—rather than presenting illusions of positivist objectivity, which is patently inappropriate for research under the aegis of constructivism. Without abandoning the stylised rhetoric of reporting scientific psychological research, Morrow’s framework gives the reporter of qualitative research
the scope within which to fully explicate a study, and thus enable the reader to comprehend fully what transpired and to facilitate consideration of replicability and relevance to context. Hoyt and Bhati (2007) reasonably criticised researchers who professed their conduct of qualitative research in published literature, yet had not actually complied with the conventions and assumption of qualitative research. The explicit manner in which the qualitative studies of this research project were conducted, and reported in alignment with Morrow’s (2005) guidelines, guards against the potential for similar criticism.

Can the entire research project be considered valid? Certainly, the explication of the Studies’ ontology, epistemology, paradigm, methods and rhetoric (Ponterotto, 2005) provide the first layer of accountability. Adapting Morrow’s (2005) reporting convention provides another dimension of transparency and authenticity. So too does reflecting on the studies’ compliance with the various forms of transcendent and paradigm-specific validity defined by Morrow (2005). All of this would achieve the technical benchmarks of transactional validity, but what would it say of transformational validity (Cho & Trent, 2006)?

According to Cho and Trent (2006), transformational validity goes beyond the basic requirements of qualitative research: aiming for an holistic intellectual endeavour, transformational validity requires research to lead toward emancipatory, progressive, social change—which is akin to Morrow’s (2005) requirements for ideological-critical research. There is no obvious evidence that this research project has emancipated the counsellors and clients who participated in the studies. Perhaps “emancipation” is connotatively too strong an expression. But, there is evidence that the counsellors learned a new approach to career and career development practice through the application of My Career Chapter per se, and through the workshop learning exercise
Your Career Counselling Worldview (Watson, 2006). Likewise, there is evidence that clients changed as a result of engaging with My Career Chapter.

Formalised reflexive writing is virtually invisible in the psychology and career development literature—hence my foray into autoethnography. It cannot be emphasised enough, that, as a scientist-practitioner, I was transformed by the threatening experience (Vickers, 2002) of the autoethnographic studies, particularly Study 1. If my very public accountability through the autoethnographies of this research endeavour serves as an example for other scientist-practitioners struggling with our intellectual and professional culture’s inherent paradigmatic tensions and contradictions, and informs their progress toward intimate, reflexive research, then on that measure, the research project will have achieved transformational validity. That outcome, of course, is dependent upon the research being read. I am, nevertheless, heartened by Hermans’s (2006a) “autobiographical sketch” of his research career over four decades, through which he narratively connects his intellectual development and the concomitant formation of the Theory of Dialogical Self. Such historical reflection, as I argued in the Discussion of Study 1, contributes to the intellectual vigour of the discipline by contextualising research and development work, and thus enabling other researchers to gain an intimate insight into a particular topic of inquiry.

The transformative capacity of autoethnographic research was partly facilitated by application of the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise (McMahon & Patton, 2006b, p. 106) in Study 2. This research project presents an example of how that self-reflective exercise can be put into practice. Furthermore, this research effectively extends the applicability of the exercise from its original application by McMahon and Patton. This has implications not only for future reflexive research, and not only
autoethnographic, but as a mechanism for facilitating reflection on learning experiences specific to career development research and training.

**Limitations and Potential Research**

*User Characteristics.* The research process of this project was deliberately constrained for the purpose of investigating My Career Chapter as a new and untested career assessment and counselling procedure. Thus, the studies were conducted with a level of caution, particularly in limiting the study of client-users’ reactions. Client-users who acted as participants in this research project were carefully selected with respect to their level of career-related distress and English verbal ability. Nevertheless, the two studies of client-users’ reactions to My Career Chapter did not indicate that it was a source of distress—not withstanding some participants finding some aspects of the process tedious (viz., the compatibility matrix). The two studies of counsellor-users’ appraisals of My Career Chapter also indicated that they saw it as having limited risk to clients.

Having established a baseline of safety with a limited population of client-users it is now appropriate to approach investigations into My Career Chapter’s applicability for other client-groups with different demographic, educational, or psychological characteristics. The recommendations by school guidance counsellors in Study 4 certainly indicate the potential to expand My Career Chapter into an adolescent version. Furthermore, the use of writing has been well established as supportive counselling procedure for distressed clients (Cameron & Nicholls, 1998), so it may be possible to use My Career Chapter with clients who are experiencing heightened levels of career-related distress and capable of venting their distress through writing.

*Outcome Research.* There are compelling scientific, professional, and policy-related arguments for engaging in the evaluation of any career development intervention
(e.g., Athanasou, 2007; Bernes, Bardick, & Orr, 2007; Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Maguire, 2004; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004b; Plant, 2004; Watts, 1999; Watts & Dent, 2006). As previously mentioned, this research project primarily set out to explore counselling process (Heppner & Heppner, 2003); it did not directly aim to investigate outcome. Nevertheless, having established some understanding of the process of My Career Chapter through explication of its development and users’ experience of it in action, and that it is at least safe in the confines of a proper career counselling relationship, it may be appropriate to consider the research into the outcomes of My Career Chapter. But, how should that question be addressed?

In their conceptualisation of defining empirically supported therapy, Chambless and Hollon (1998) differentiated between efficacy and effectiveness, where the former pertained to controlled (laboratory) studies and the latter to field studies with “real” clients. This research project has raised some tentative questions with respect to effectiveness, in that there is evidence of My Career Chapter’s acceptance by counsellors as a potentially valuable intervention, and that clients’ positive reaction to completing the task and its meaningfulness for them, would augur well for counselling outcomes. Studies which investigate My Career Chapter’s impact by: (a) comparing clients’ change across time on either standard measures or phenomenological interviews; (b) comparing it against theoretically similarly narrative procedures (e.g., My System of Career Influences) or traditional interventions (e.g., vocational psychometrics); and (c) evaluating it across different client groups, or with control groups, would enable researchers and practitioners to consider its effectiveness more critically. In the short- to medium-term outlook, there may be some scope to consider the application of single case study research (Lundervold & Belwood, 2000; O'Kelly,
by engaging in follow-up studies with the clients who participated in Study 6. Such research would complement other case study research into career counselling effectiveness (Kirschner, Hoffman, & Hill, 1994) and how individuals narratively construct their careerlives (Ochberg, 1988). It will also add to the broader body of evidence pertaining to effectiveness, notably the value of written exercises and individualised interpretation and feedback (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000).

The usual time taken to interpret a protocol with a client is at least one session, with follow-up interpretation sessions recommended. Is this time well spent? Thus, should future research find evidence in support of My Career Chapter’s efficacy or clinical effectiveness on measures of outcome, there may also be a need to consider its cost-effectiveness (Athanasou, 2007; Chambless & Hollon, 1998; Watts & Dent, 2006). Online or computerised versions against paper-based versions may play a role in such an evaluation, as would comparisons of My Career Chapter against alternative assessment and counselling products.

*My Career Chapter Manuscripts as Data.* Finally, there may be some scope to consider the autobiographical manuscripts that are derived from My Career Chapter as a source of qualitative data per se (Polkinghorne, 2005). Such data would be appropriate for idiographic (Runyan, 1983) and narratological research (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005; Bochner, 2001; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Hoshmand, 2005; Schiff, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2006). This would enable an additional means to study individuals’ stories (Jarvinen, 2004) and how they bring sense and coherence to their lives (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; Baumeister & Newman, 1994; McAdams, 2006); and to research germane issues such as vocational exploration (Flum & Blustein, 2000) and the development of career identity (Bujold, 2004; Meijers, 1998). Such research could use semi-structured narrative analysis procedures (Neimeyer, 2006).
to study the autobiographies. Alternatively, the research may use the analysis of text, voice, conversation and discourse (Leiman, 2004; Osatuke, Gray, Glick, Stiles, & Barkham, 2004; Sinclair & Monk, 2005; Winslade, 2005) to consider how the client and counsellor work through the reading and co-constructive process of interpretation.

Additional research along these lines would certainly enrich the understanding of My Career Chapter. Such research, moreover, would contribute to the base of research into the process, outcome, efficacy, and effectiveness of constructivist, narrative career counselling; which, despite the vigour of its adherents, remains to be tested to the equivalent standard of traditional approaches to career development practice.

Commentary on My Career Chapter

This research project has demonstrated that My Career Chapter is a theoretically informed career assessment and counselling procedure which falls under the theoretical aegis of constructivism. Through its design and processes, it represents a purposeful operationalisation of the Systems Theory Framework, the Theory of Career Construction, and the Theory of Dialogical Self. It also represents a working example of the narrative approach to career counselling as a form that enables a client to write a personalised autobiography within the context of a career counselling relationship. The studies of this research project can be taken to suggest that My Career Chapter substantively aligns with evidence (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000) that written exercises and individualised interpretation and feedback are important for client outcomes. As such, My Career Chapter is an important achievement for the narrative approach to career development, as it indirectly affirms that school’s value as a potential source of guidance for professional and theoretical innovation.
Ethical Considerations

As argued in a Parenthetic Consideration, *Traffic Police for the Invisible Hand* (McIlveen & Patton, 2006), career counselling is a professional activity which operates within the context of social and economic contingencies (McIlveen, 2007a) and should comply with ethical standards. As such, any career assessment and counselling procedure’s ethical dimension should be brought into question as part of an evaluation (Athanasou, 2007).

Notwithstanding the caveat that My Career Chapter may not be suitable for all clients, it was found to be a career assessment and counselling procedure with limited risk of psychological harm to clients and counsellors. This is an important finding because it means that counsellors may proceed cautiously in their application of My Career Chapter, with some assurance that it has been put to the test and found to be reasonably benign. On another ethical issue: if, on the basis of the guidance counsellors’ apparent enthusiasm, a version for younger clients were to be developed, then consideration should be given to the content of the sentence-stem items which make reference to issues presumably requiring adult sensibilities (e.g., sexuality).

The professional counsellors who participated in this research project clearly suggested that My Career Chapter should be used within the context of a career counselling relationship. Their recommendation aligns with research which indicates the superiority of career interventions involving a counsellor, as opposed to no counsellor (Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003); especially given the importance of individual interpretation and feedback (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Brown et al., 2003) and of the counselling relationship when using qualitative career assessment procedures (McMahon & Patton, 2002b). Such a control on its application would likely diminish the risk of harm even further. Logistically however, this places limitations upon the
public availability of the procedure which may have potential benefits for a host of individuals. Thus, the issue of disseminating My Career Chapter needs further and careful consideration.

Alignment with Standards

My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommendations for qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) was investigated in this research project. Without labouring the point of the conclusions presented in the studies, and the preliminary desk audit of My Career Chapter, the following statements can be asserted:

1. My Career Chapter is grounded in theories and the constructivist, narrative approach to career development.
2. It has undergone testing of its process throughout this research project.
3. It is inherently holistic by its coverage of the STF influences.
4. It comes with comprehensive instructions that are accessible for most potential clients.
5. It is logical, relatively simple, and done in steps and stages.
6. It is focused on the systems of career influences and the goal of preparing a career-related autobiography, and it is flexible so as to allow the client and counsellor to engage with its steps and stages according to their needs.
7. It engages the client and the counsellor in a co-constructive process through the reading back and interpretation phase (and the counselling relationship per se).
8. It includes an inherent debriefing process through its embeddedness in the career counselling relationship.
Thus, it is concluded that the studies of this project offer evidence of My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommendations proffered by McMahon, Patton and Watson (2003).

Apart from My System of Career Influences Reflection Activity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), no other qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure entered into the career development literature (or, in good conscience, of which I am apprised), has explicitly met those recommendations. But, what is the significance of this achievement? Why bother?

Whilst there are explicit guidelines for the development and application of traditional quantitative psychometric assessment procedures, such as the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association. American Psychological Association. National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), there are few standards by which qualitative assessment and counselling procedures may be critically evaluated (Goldman, 1992; McMahon & Patton, 2002b; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). This is problematic for three significant reasons.

Firstly, judging qualitative procedures against the standards for quantitative procedures will inevitably result in failure, and little will be learned. Secondly, stakeholders in the research, development, production, supply, and application of qualitative procedures need unequivocal guidelines by which evaluations can be made according to their respective intellectual, economic, professional, and personal requirements. This problem leads to the final point.

Despite, or perhaps in spite of, a surge of interest, constructivist and social constructionist views in counselling (Erwin, 1999) and career development (Guindon & Richmond, 2005) have not gone without criticism. The constructivist, narrative approach to career is deserving of criticism for (as yet) failing to produce a body of
empirical research—regardless of paradigm—which accounts for its process and outcome. It is intellectually and professionally insufficient to snipe at the traditional paradigms of research and practice without delivering an alternative, and thus furnish the substance of a “paradigm shift”. Hence, this research project attempts to proffer something toward questions of process and demonstrates the utility of the recommendations for the development of and research into qualitative career assessment and counselling procedures. The recommendations may change over the course of consistent and rigorous research and practice; however, in their current form, they at least present a point of departure for the research journey.

Thus, My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommendations is a positive achievement for the procedure per se, but it also represents progress toward acceptance and legitimisation of the recommendations for qualitative procedures.

The Unexplored Quantitative Dimension

My Career Chapter contains a quantitative dimension that has gone unexplored in this research project. The sentence-stem items requiring clients to rate the impact and emotional valence of their respective career influences, resemble ratings used in the Self-Confrontation Method (Hermans, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1999, 2001c; Hermans, Fiddelaers, de Groot, & Nauta, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993) and the Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b, 2002b, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2004), which have been the mainstay of assessment of dialogical self. Clients who complete My Career Chapter on a second occasion would be able to make contrasts and comparisons between their two sets of ratings. Alternatively, the ratings could be arranged into a group of correlation co-efficient, as Hermans and his colleague do in their application of the Self-Confrontation Method or Personal Position Repertoire. In a similar vein, the impact and
emotional valence ratings could be compared with the matrix of compatibility ratings scores, in which a client considers the relationships between his or her systems of internal and external influences.

**Potential for Continuing Development**

My Career Chapter went through changes in the course of this research project; most notably were the inclusion of sentence-stems regarding the impact of career influences and their emotional valence, and the deletion of the second compatibility matrix task through which the user estimated the relationship between his or her systems of internal influences. These modifications came about as a direct result of the studies which indicated users’ difficulty with the matrix task. Without doubt, other modifications will be proposed in the future. It is reasonably clear that the compatibility task requires either significant simplification or deletion because of its complexity for users. Its purpose was to engender a spatial dimension to contemplating systems of career influences, and this remains a theoretically important process; however, some thought should be given to reformulating the process.

**Procedural Simplification.** Whilst there is evidence that clients and counsellors were able to use My Career Chapter effectively and gain from the experience, there is scope to simplify its procedures. Indeed, the school guidance counsellors (in Study 4) indicated that My Career Chapter could be segmented in its administration so as to assist younger clients to work through the process. Client-users’ experiences in Study 6 also gave indication of the potential to modify the instructions, to include a colour version of the STF diagram, and to amend the compatibility task.

**Online Version.** To extend the recommendation for procedural simplification, especially given the relatively laborious nature of completing My Career Chapter by hand writing, there is some scope to consider developing a computerised version,
perhaps via an internet platform, as this has proved useful for other procedures (Viljamaa, Patton, & McMahon, 2006). Whilst it is assumed that the same content will be used, the speed and flexibility of keyboard entry offers some benefits, especially for individuals who feel pressed for time or dislike hand-writing. This form of administration may be able to include a compiled and then printed manuscript of a client’s autobiography; which would certainly make the reading process easier. Other options may include voice recording or loading visual material to supplement the verbal content. Individuals who are visually impaired would possibly benefit from having a voice-activated version which would enable him or her to hear the instructions and record responses to the storying process. Moreover, hearing one’s voice speaking back through the computer would offer considerable potential to operationalise further the sequencing of dialogue according to the Theory of Dialogical Self.

Reading and Interpretation Process. The reading and interpretation process is important to the experience of My Career Chapter, yet certainly lends itself to procedural modification. For example, counsellors may choose to integrate gestalt methods to enhance the experience in which the client talks to himself or herself as a younger person. Perhaps this could be modified to include adaptation of the empty-chair technique in counselling. This would possibly benefit clients who need additional assistance in talking with themselves. Alternatively, My Career Chapter could be used with an individual with whom a client has a close and trusting relationship: perhaps by actively involving a parent in career counselling (cf. Amundson & Penner, 1998; Palmer & Cochran, 1988; Young & Valach, 1997; Young et al., 2001) or to support self-disclosure in mentoring (Wanberg, Welsh, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007); albeit involving a subsequent debriefing and interpretation process with the counsellor. This extended application of My Career Chapter may correspond with the effects associated
with teaching clients how to build a network of supporters (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000). It would also demonstrate concordance with the de-centeredness of career into the social sphere of an individual, apropos of the System Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), and the increasing awareness of a relationship approach to career (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Schultheiss, 2003, 2005) and the notion of constructed joint-action (Young & Valach, 2004).

Combination with MSCI. As a working model of the assessment and counselling procedures that can emanate from the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), My Career Chapter is, in many respects, a parallel form of the adult version of the My System of Career Influence (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2007). The distinguishing features of the two are that MSCI is primarily visual and spatial, whereas My Career Chapter is primarily linear and verbal in administration. It is tempting to consider that the first three steps of My Career Chapter (i.e., the warm up questions, considering the big picture using the STF diagram, and then the compatibility task) which serve not only as advanced organisers for the manuscript writing per se, but also to generate clients’ sense of spatiality in their career life, could be replaced by the MSCI if it and My Career Chapter were to be used as complementary procedures, one following the other. Together, they would certainly provide a comprehensive career assessment and counselling experience for clients, enabling clients with varying cognitive abilities (i.e., visual, verbal) to fully benefit from their cognitive preferences and yet be challenged in another domain.

Training. Chambless and Hollon (1998) raised an important point with respect to a given intervention’s potential for dissemination through avenues of practitioner training. They suggested that interventions that are readily learned by practitioners would have a greater uptake by the professional community. Given that this research
project has successfully trialled a training workshop for My Career Chapter (through Studies 3 and 4), it is reasonable to suggest that similar training would facilitate its uptake by the career development industry. Such dissemination would present opportunities for research into the procedure’s value, or otherwise, in professional settings different to that used for this research project (i.e., university student counselling). Study 4 certainly offers some scope for exploration of My Career Chapter’s redevelopment for application in the school setting.

Commentary on Theory: Application of Dialogical Self

In previous sections of the dissertation, the Systems Theory Framework and the Theory of Career Construction were outlined along with their respective theoretical tenets. As two theoretical frameworks with constructivist orientations, they are amenable to extension using the Theory of Dialogical Self. The following sub-sections present two conceptual proposals on how the Theory of Dialogical Self can be converged with the other two in the spirit of convergence in counselling and vocational psychology (cf. Chen, 2003; Hansen, 2002; Savickas, 1995b, 2001b; Savickas & Lent, 1994), using My Career Chapter as a working example.

Systems Theory Framework and Dialogical Self

The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a) is a comprehensive heuristic through which the multifarious influences that go to make up a person’s career can be conceptualised. A purported benefit of the STF is its inherent capacity to subsume or integrate with different theories of vocational psychology, particularly those described by Patton and McMahon in their summary of theories focused upon content influences of career, those focused upon process influences, and those combining content and process. For example, in their most recent formulation of STF, Patton and McMahon (2006a) added the emergent Theory of Career Construction
(Savickas, 2005) to the group of constructivist theories that may be organised by STF. In addition to its value as a vehicle for theoretical work, the STF has been a significant conceptual aid for constructivist career counselling (McMahon & Patton, 2006b), demonstrated by a number of pragmatic constructivist procedures emanating from its tenets (e.g., McIlveen, 2006; McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005).

Notwithstanding the achievements of the aforementioned scholarship and practice, there remains scope to develop the STF’s theoretical accounting for the generation of meaningful connections amongst the myriad influences identified within the system of a person’s career, and thus to elaborate upon STF’s purported constructivist underpinnings. This conceptual proposal addresses the STF with respect to its capacity for theoretical integration.

In order to test the STF’s capacity as an integrative framework, in terms of the epistemological criterion of generative theory (Gergen, 1992) (i.e., the capacity to bring new theoretical vistas with pragmatic outcomes), this paper will propose that a theory of personality, the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), can be integrated with the STF, particularly in reference to its postulated element of story. Such integration would advance the STF’s explanatory capacity. A constructivist ontology and epistemology are assumed from the outset of this conceptual task.

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From various theoretical perspectives, the psychological construct of self has been identified as a potential juncture for the integration of vocational theories (e.g., Bordin, 1994; Lent & Hackett, 1994). Indeed, the early psychological theory of Williams James (1890/1952) alluded to how the self, the *I*, brought coherence to the various *Me* states of an individual, which included one’s occupation. In posing the preconditions for an answer to the question “Who am I?” with respect to career, and to posit a potential solution to the problem of theoretical convergence, Blustein (1994) argued that the notion of *embedded identity* required theorists to position a person’s sense of self within the context of broader influences surrounding a person (i.e., familial factors and sociocultural factors). In doing so, Blustein suggested that such an approach to career, identity, and the individual would recognise the nexus of a person’s psychological, social, and cultural worlds, rather than simply presenting a dissected view of the psychology of work and career (cf. Blustein, 2006).

The congruence between the STF and the notion of *embedded identity* is clear. The STF has the multifarious individual inextricably embedded in equally diverse interpersonal, social, cultural, economic, and political influences. Furthermore, Blustein (1994) called for research into the psychological process by which self-knowledge is constructed amidst the myriad factors of an individual’s world. The STF offers a promising response to that call.

Story provides a potential solution to Blustein’s (1994) theoretical challenge of contextualising the individual. Story has been emphasised by theorists as a metaphor for understanding career (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Inkson, 2007); and so too has the process of storying in counselling practice (e.g., Cochran, 1997; McMahon, 2006, in press; Savickas, 2005). Patton and McMahon (2006a) posited *story* as a fundamental process
of the STF. Story, in their formulation, is akin to story in the narrative approach to career counselling, in which a person, through narrative, makes meaningful sense of the influences in his or her life: that is, “through story, individuals construct their own meaning about experiences and their own reality” (Patton & McMahon, 2006a, p. 222).

Nevertheless, the process of how individuals psychologically construct the stories of their various identities and careers is a relatively unexplored conceptual area within the theoretical corpus of vocational psychology. It is insufficient for theorists merely to purport that individuals construct and co-construct career stories, and to leave the assumption without further explication. Moreover, the theoretical possibilities are too exciting to ignore. Whilst Patton and McMahon (2006) have emphasised the role of story in the STF, there is scope to further explicate its theoretical composition. Hence, the STF may be augmented by the inclusion of, or convergence with, such a theorised psychological process within the formulation of its tenets. In order to address that issue, I now turn to dialogical self and advance an argument toward convergence of the STF and Theory of Dialogical Self.

*Story and Dialogical Self: Work in Progress*

The Theory of Dialogical Self has been widely articulated by Hubert Hermans and his colleagues (e.g., Hermans, 2006a; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). It has a significant presence with the counselling and psychotherapy literature (e.g., Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). It has also been the subject of special issues in scholarly journals (e.g., the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, *Theory and Psychology*, and *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*). Given that convergence of the STF’s theoretic element of story is the focus of this paper, it may be useful to introduce
a literary metaphor for dialogical self, prior to describing the relevant theoretical features of the Theory of Dialogical Self.

Hermans (2002b) metaphorically described dialogical self as an author who submits a manuscript to a scholarly journal. Having received comments from the journal reviewers, the author attempts to make sense of their criticisms and recommendations by engaging in a dialogue with their text. In order to make sense of the comments, the author attempts to read and understand the comments from the perspective of the first reviewer, thus taking on a different authorial position, and then returns to his or her original author position in order to integrate the two perspectives. The process is repeated for the position of the second reviewer, with the author returning back to the original position, of course now different because of the integration of the first perspective, and subsequently different upon integration of the second perspective. The cycling amongst perspectives continues, and upon successive integrations the manuscript changes, and so on. Extend the journal submission metaphor: make the journal manuscript into an autobiography manuscript. Thus, the evolving formulation of a person’s autobiographical story, subsuming career life themes (Savickas, 2005), may be envisaged as a process of a person constantly moving amongst different positions of perspective in life in order to build up a dynamic and meaningful narrative.

Hermans (2002b) described the dialogical self as a “dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in an imaginal landscape” (p.71) [my italics]. In dialogue—real or imagined—with individuals—real or imagined—a person inevitably attempts to grasp the meaning of the other’s discourse and, to do so, takes the perspective of another I-position: thus reformulating the ongoing narrative of his or her life. This personal
narrative is truly a work in progress embedded in the context of an individual’s world, made up of the real and the known, and the unreal and unknown.

Hermans’s (2002b) metaphor of an “imaginal landscape” (p. 71) provides the opening for an excursion into merging the multidimensional theoretical structure of the STF and dialogical self. Hermans (2002b) graphically represented the dialogical self as a field of interconnected, moving dots, which represent I-positions, some connected and some not. A person’s I-positions may be internal, with reference to parts of one-self (e.g., I as mother), or external, with reference to others or parts of the environment (e.g., my friend). The field is divided by a permeable frontier with two semi-circles, one half consisting of internal and the other external positions; with I-positions exchanging dialogue with one another at any moment in time. Salient positions are up-front and toward the frontier between internal and external; quiet and unheard positions are diminished and distal. This variation in salience parallels the (discontinuous) change in predominance of STF influences.
Figure 6. Herman’s model of I-positions in the self


Hermans (2003) also commented that the boundaries between domains of positions may vary or be permeable as a condition of the contemporary world. The parallel between Hermans’s model of dialogical self and the STF is striking, with each position being represented by an influence within the STF at a particular point in time. The semi-permeability of influences, graphically represented by Patton and McMahon (2006a) as broken boundary lines around each influence, likewise parallels the permeability of the I-positions identified by Hermans. This permeability highlights the diffuse contextual nature of self, as “there is no essential difference between the positions a person takes as part of the self and the positions people take as part of a heterogenous society” (Hermans, 2002a, p. 147).

A person may take an I-position of any influence within the STF. An I-position may be within the individual system (e.g., gender: I as a male), within the social system (e.g., family: I as father, brother, or cousin), or within the environmental-societal system (e.g., socioeconomic status: I as middle-class mortgagee). A person may also take I-positions of influences that are “external” and personalise them possessively as “mine”. Using the previous influences as examples, one can take I-positions of my father, my brother, my cousin, my social class. As these external influences are brought into possession by the I, the (Cartesion) distinction between the “internal” and “external” psychological worlds is diminished. By thus decentring identity, Hermans modified the
profound question “Who am I?” to be “rephrased as “Who am I in relation to the other?” and “Who is the other in relation to me?” (2003, p. 104). The individual can thus achieve identity only through dialogical relations with influences of the “other” and the “outside” (cf. Buber, 1958/1923; Ricoeur, 1992), even when the other is another part of oneself (i.e., influences of the individual system) which has been objectified and possessed (e.g., my self-confidence) or subjectified (e.g., I as a confident person).

Meaning is generated when an individual moves from one I-position to another (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). Hence, as a person speaks from the perspective of one STF influence, taken as an I-position within his or her systems of influences, then speaks from another position, then combines the dialogue of both, meaning is created. With successive movements between positions, and dialogue amongst positions, the depth and breadth of a person’s story increases. Rather than speaking from a single (potentially attenuated and undifferentiated) I-position—take vocational traits for example—a person can construct layers of his or her story by speaking from alternative I-positions such as disability, sexuality, ethnicity and so forth. A career story constructed upon the perspectives of multiple influences is a far more elaborate and meaningful account than a simplistic typological account (e.g., “I am an ABC type, therefore XYZ occupations suit me”). STF and Theory of Dialogical Self thus capture the decentred multiplicity of the individual who is contextualised by the environment through which he or she exists as an identity. The notion of identity as being embedded (Blustein, 1994) thus can be illustrated as dialogical self moving across I-positions within the myriad systems of influences.

**Dialogical Self and Career Counselling**

Hermans (2006b) identified three forms of disorganised self-narrative that are of clinical interest: *barren narrative, cacophony,* and *monologue*. In career counselling, the
barren narrative would manifest as a client having little or no story of his or her career, nor knowing where or how to start exploring. The cacophony would manifest as vivid expression of competing career interests, responsibilities, and limitations, with limited coherence and loaded with contradictions. A monologue would be present as a fixed and immovable belief and career-decidedness, despite inherent disadvantages.

From the merged perspective of STF and dialogical self, a client who presents for career counselling with the typical presenting problem of being undecided about his or her career would be invited to participate in an exploratory process which has as its aim the thickening of a barren narrative or monologue, or clarifying the cacophony of his or her extant career story. This would not be an objective fact-finding mission for the purpose of vocational diagnosis. It would be a process of voicing all of the career influences, as I-positions, and thus giving text to each. The ensuing process of bringing the voice and text of the influences together reveals correspondence, irrelevance, or contradiction. The counsellor likewise brings his or her voice into the mix toward the shared co-construction of a new career story. From a narrative perspective, plots, themes and characters may emerge, be evaluated, reformulated, or recontextualised in counselling. This describes a process of constructing career through narrative (cf. Bujold, 2004) as *life themes* (Savickas, 2005). Dialogical self thus offers a theoretical solution to the question of how individuals psychologically construct their career stories and life themes.

The Theory of Dialogical Self underpins a range of counselling and assessment procedures: take for example, the Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b). This method requires a client to construct meaningful valuations for a range of internal I-positions (e.g., I as man, I as partner) and external I-positions (e.g., my mother, my work). These valuations are brought together to determine their correspondence or
contradiction as grist for the psychotherapy. The process facilitates dialogue amongst positions toward a profound, meaningful understanding of oneself at a particular location in time. It is repeated over the course of psychotherapy, both as a vehicle of hermeneutic exploration and as an account upon which the client and counsellor may reflect to determine therapeutic change.

Engendering dialogue amongst the STF I-positions has been demonstrated in career counselling by the Career Systems Interview (McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003). In this procedure, the client is encouraged to view his or her career from the position of different influences, through the process of a free-flowing semi-structured interview (Schultheiss, 2005). To thicken the story associated with a particular influence identified in the STF, he or she is facilitated to speak about how that story correlates with or contradicts other aspects of his or her career generated from other positions. The act of hearing his or her voice speaking the words of previously unexpressed or undeveloped stories (cf. McMahon, 2006) is considered a key process of the Career Systems Interview and is akin to Hermans’s (2003) notion of innovation of dialogical self in which one position is brought from obscurity to the foreground of consciousness.

Written procedures such as the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) Reflection Activity (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005) and My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography (McIlveen, 2006) achieve a similar dialogical process for clients, but through the additional experience of drawing and writing about the influences within their systems of influences. Before engaging in the autobiographical writing of their career story in the My Career Chapter, a client is required to “de-centre” his or her career influences by rating the compatibility or incompatibility of individual (internal) influences with social and environmental (external) influences. This
procedure was based upon the idea of the matrix of internal and external I-positions within the Personal Position Repertoire. This preparatory activity is followed by writing about each career influence in meaningful detail, entailing a statement of each influence’s past, present and future, salience, and its emotional valence. Upon completing the manuscript, the client dialogues with himself or herself by presenting the story to a younger version of himself or herself, and by seeking his or her feedback. Through this process, the client not only decentres his or her career, but actively engages with aspects of himself or herself as “other”, that is, another I-position in a particular period of time. My Career Chapter thus represents a working example of the deliberate and successful integration of STF and the Theory of Dialogical Self at the level of practice (McIlveen, 2007b).

Conclusion

This section presents an argument that the theoretical composition of the STF’s process influence of story can be improved by converging it with the construct of dialogical self. Through the lens of the psychological construct of dialogical self, it is suggested that individuals act as autobiographers constantly in dialogue with their phenomenal world—real, unreal, known, and imagined. Through this dialogue with the “other”, an individual builds up his or her story, plots, themes, and characterisations in relation to his or her career. Moving from the perspective of one influence to another, an individual composes a complex and meaningful story. Moreover, an individual co-constructs stories in context of the “other”, situated amidst myriad career influences which are aptly defined by the STF. As such, it is concluded that the STF meets the epistemological criterion of theoretical generativity (Gergen, 1992).

Consistent with the spirit of theoretical convergence and transtheoretical integration (cf. Savickas & Lent, 1994), STF serves as a framework for career theories
and career development practices from a range of theoretical traditions and disciplines. As such, the STF does not ostensibly privilege one theory of career over another. Whilst this is a laudable aim, there are ontological and epistemological questions that remain unanswered within the current formulation of STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a).

For example, how can STF account for the tension between one school of thought which assumes realist ontology and another which assumes constructivist ontology? They are mutually exclusive. Alternatively, how can the STF account for the fundamental differences in the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the theories that fall within the conceptual groupings of mechanicism, formism, organicism and contextualism? Patton and McMahon argue in favour of a contextualist epistemology for STF, yet allow for the accession of theories founded upon formist grounds (e.g., trait-and-factor). These questions require answers if the STF is to be advanced as a bridging, or indeed unifying, framework for theory.

McMahon and Patton (2006) emphasise STF as being a manifestation of constructivism (McMahon & Patton, 2006b). Therefore, it would be useful to assess the STF against the themes of a constructivist epistemology of practice and the attendant criterion of neopragmatism (Polkinghorne, 1992). Thus, the solution to the ontological and epistemological incompatibility amongst the theories it subsumes, is not within the STF itself, but rather within the theorist, researcher or practitioner using the STF: for it is the user of the theoretical framework who brings it to bear upon his or her local situation and conceptual problems in order make sense for him or her. This approach would readily satisfy Polkinghorne’s notion of neopragmatism.

Such a solution is good and well for the theorist with a proclivity for constructivist thought, but offers little inspiration for the theorist who holds a realist worldview and pursues the attendant science of logical positivism. The challenge for
adherents of STF, and its capacity for theoretical integration, is to demonstrate the value it brings to theory, research and practice across diverse and disparate domains. This sub-section has partly contributed to addressing that challenge by demonstrating STF’s capacity to subsume a theory of personality which, although constructivist in orientation, has a significant dimension of empiricism in its rhetoric and methods.

*Career Construction: Dialogical Self at Work*

The Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002, 2005) purports that individuals generate life themes to make sense of career. Although the theory’s propositions include the statement that “career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations” (Savickas, 2005, p. 46), explication of this theoretical tenet is required to advance further the capacity of the life themes component of the theory. This objective could be achieved by positing a psychological construct to explain how conversations can generate meaningful themes through dialogue with others and with oneself.

It is proposed here that the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) can contribute to the achievement of the objective of theoretically explaining how individuals make meaningful sense of career. Accordingly, dialogical self is presented as a psychological construct which acts as the author and narrator of life themes. Such a theoretical solution improves the explanatory capacity of the Theory of Career Construction.

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One’s dialogical self is simultaneously one’s multiply-positioned authors, narrators, and actors; it is the creator of life themes, the teller of the stories, and the enacting body. As such, the dialogical self can be conceptualised as the creator of subjective career: that notion which brings meaning to the activities that go to make up the collective sum of a person’s objective career. This process ranges from the construction of a simple theme through to multiple themes, which may then be thickened into a complex story. Borrowing from Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) systems approach, themes can be conceptualised as being layered from the domain of the person through to the extended domain of society-at-large (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-levels). Dialogical self simultaneously exists across space and through time. By using Bronfenbrenner’s systems approach in this paper, I attempt to explicate the spatial dimensions of dialogical self; in doing so, however, I do not suggest that the temporal dimensions are in any way less significant.

Micro-theme

Savickas (2005) suggested that life themes make meaningful sense of vocational personality and adaptability characteristics. At the simplest level, consistent patterns of thinking, behaving, and feeling (e.g., occupational traits and interests) are meaningfully apprehended by the individual. For example, a person may take an I-position of a Realistic type (apropos of Holland, 1985). In taking an I-position and saying to oneself and the world through dialogical relations: “I am an ABC type and XYZ occupation would suit me best”, the client hears his or her own voice and, in doing so, reifies his or her type through the very act of speaking as if it were true. This simplistic formulation introduces the nexus of vocational personality and life themes within Theory of Career Construction. The storying by dialogical self goes to another level of complexity, however.
Meso-theme

Parameters on conversations about the world-of-work are set through the authoring constructed via the prism of a particular I-position. The person can only become what his or her I-positions can author, narrate, and act. However, dialogical self is not necessarily limited to one career identity; it has the capacity to take multiple I-positions and thus create multiple alternative career stories. As an individual moves between I-positions to take another authorial perspective, he or she enriches the potential for diverse stories and self-characterisations. Thus, an individual who takes an I-position of a Realistic type, may also concurrently take a position of an Investigative type, and then also take up a position relating to his or her family interests, and can create separate characters within the same story. He or she can interweave those characters to create a new meaningful vista on his or her career. The characterisation of the theme may manifest as: “I am practical and hands-on, but I am also inquisitive, and my family is important to me”. This multi-I-positional process further accounts for the nexus between vocational personality and life themes in the Theory of Career Construction. At the next level of complexity in storying, the dialogical self transcends the simple features of vocational personality and adaptability characteristics.

Exo-theme

A rich life theme is produced by a dialogical self that moves between I-positions and reflexively communicates within itself using the discourses of its world, particularly the world-of-work, and progressively builds up a good story (McAdams, 2006) that brings coherent meaning and action. The dialogical self can construct stories and give voices to the myriad influences inherent in the complexity of career, such as those identified in the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). In this way, the I-positions that dialogical self may take are not necessarily inner aspects of
vocational personality (e.g., Realistic or Investigative interests) that are dealt with as micro- and meso-themes. I-positions may be outer aspects of a person, such as interpersonal (e.g., being a friend or foe), cultural (e.g., living the life of a downtrodden indigenous person), geographic (e.g., leaving the country to move to Sydney), or political (e.g., a conservative outlook). Thus, a person may construct a career story from a vantage point of a cultural or a political position. Continuing from the previous example, the outer influences may be integrated as: “I am practical and hands-on, but I am also inquisitive. My wife wants to live in the country, but I see myself as a city person”. This example indicates how an individual knows of himself, but also must create an understanding of himself, which is ultimately a meaningful compromise (Chen, 2004).

Macro-theme

Whilst the Theory of Career Construction proposes that society and its institutions shape individuals’ roles, it does not specifically account for the discursive limits of an individual, whereas dialogical self—itself a discursive construct—provides a theoretical solution to explaining how an individual cannot become, in a career sense, whatever they desire. Dialogical self is inherent in the discursive environment in which an individual exists. An I-position authors stories only in the language and symbols it apprehends and by which it communicates and exchanges with its inner and outer world. An individual who has been richly exposed to the world of work and can negotiate the multiple discourses of that world, will likely be able to generate several I-positions which can generate several alternatives stories for his or her career. Unfortunately those individuals whose exposure to the world-of-work has been attenuated by broader influences (e.g., social class), constrained by collective voices (e.g., gender), or inadvertently manipulated by pernicious societal and professional
discourses (McIlveen & Patton, 2006), may be unable to take a similar array of I-positions, and their career aspirations would be thus far limited. Continuing from the previous example, the person may say: “I am practical and hands-on, but I am also inquisitive. My wife wants to live in the country, but I see myself as a city person. What chance would I have in the city anyway? There are no jobs for country people like me”.

**Thematic Dynamics**

Dialogical self does not simply author and speak from one I-position. Dialogical exchanges between concordant, disparate, or opposing I-positions go to make up the diverse text of an individual’s story. This process complies with Cochran’s (1997) narrative approach to career, which assumed that “a story is a synthetic structure that configures an indefinite expansion of elements and spheres of elements into a whole” (p. 6). As with the dynamics of the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006a), in which influences recursively interact, so too analogously the multitude of I-position aspects communicate reflexively with one another. The intersections of stories construed from the vantage point of different I-positions—personal, interpersonal, social, and environmental—extend the textual density of a person’s story into an heuristic complex that in its entirety brings meaningful sense to a person’s history, present, and future.

The Theory of Career Construction focuses on past events and memories for the generation of life themes. In this developmental frame of career construction (Savickas, 2002), dialogical self constructs career and life themes across past, present, and future. Multiple I-positions can create histories of past events and reformulate the stories in the present and prospectively for the future. Dialogical self creates the plot, subplots, characters, and the text of life themes and associated career stories. Career stories are thickened and revised as the meanings constructed through ongoing dialogical transactions between I-positions reflexively transpire into a lived reality.
Implications for Career Counselling

Within the field of career development practice, there are exemplars of narrative career counselling, with attendant constructivist theories of career which can fall within the explanatory capacity of the life themes component of Theory of Career Construction. For example, the theories of career for the Storied Approach (Brott, 2001), Cochran’s (1997) narrative counselling, McMahon’s (2006) Working with Storytellers, and Life/Work Design (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b), can be covered by the theory of life themes. All of those approaches to narrative career counselling facilitate individuals’ creating a meaningful story of their personal history, career, and life themes. However, there is insufficient substance to the theory of life themes, in its present formulation, to conceive how the co-construction process occurs for a client in those forms of narrative career counselling.

The Theory of Dialogical Self is not merely a theory of personality; it is also a theory for counselling. The telling of one’s story through counselling is germane to the dialogical self. Hermans (2001a, p. 58) stated that “clients seem to tell counsellors the stories that they themselves need to hear because, from all their available stories, they narrate those stories that support current goals and inspire action”. A person’s autobiographical sense of identity is a social construction brought into existence and modified through dialogue (Bruner, 1990; Pasupathi, 2001). In this vein, life themes are not simply a collection of historical facts reiterated in counselling. The notion of dialogical exchange is informative for counselling because it brings the conversations between a client and counsellor into focus; for it is through these conversations that a client and counsellor can co-construct life themes and together story the person whom the client was, is, and aspires to be.
Constructivist, narrative career counselling can be viewed as the process of facilitating dialogue amongst I-positions toward the co-construction of reformulated or new career stories. Generating dialogue amongst I-positions can be better understood by way of example. The Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b) is a method of assessment for facilitating dialogical exchange in accordance with the theory of dialogical self. The client is given a list of possible internal personal or social I-positions (e.g., I as man, I as spouse) and possible external positions (e.g., my friend, my house). Having written meaningful valuations regarding each internal and external position, they then are opposed to one another across \( x \) and \( y \) axes to form a matrix. The client and counsellor select particular I-positions or intersections of I-positions for discussion, comparison, contrast, and interpretation. Hence, a client may explore dialogical relations amongst the I-positions. This process allows for the development of a rich and diverse story within counselling.

A method entailing a similar process has been developed for narrative career counselling. My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography (McIlveen, 2006) facilitates clients’ writing an autobiography of their careers. In a process akin to the Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b), a client appraises the compatibility of internal and external influences upon his or her career, as identified in the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006a). The client then writes about the influences using a semi-structured format to produce a short story (McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005). Upon completing the story, the client reads aloud the story, in an imagined conversation with a younger form of himself or herself, and writes responses to the younger person’s comments on the career story. Constructions and deconstructions of knowledge are shaped through co-constructed dialogue between the career counsellor and the client. As such, the reading of the career story is replicated in vivo with a career
counsellor, and another dialogical exchange ensues. My Career Chapter thus exemplifies the facilitated construction of a career story from different *I-positions*, as internal and external career influences, and from different *I-positions* across time, as a younger person conversing with the current person, and from the real conversations between counsellor and client.

The longstanding distinction between personal and career counselling is transcended by application of the theory of dialogical self, which is extensively demonstrated in the psychotherapy literature (e.g., Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004). As indicated by the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006), the so-called “personal” issues are actually inherent in career. In order for a person to conceive a rich and diverse story of life, personal I-positions must be given voice and prominence. For example, dialogical self speaking from the I-positions of sexual orientation, health, disability, or morality, would add significant dimensions to a career story which would have otherwise been diminished if only vocational personality and adaptability characteristics were taken into account. Taking a systems approach (e.g., McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock, & Hjertum, 2003; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005), or relational approach (Schultheiss, 2005), to career assessment interviews typifies this inclusive, decentred approach to constructing a rich and diverse story in constructivist career counselling. Thus, career counselling should aim to facilitate a coherent diversity of authorship and narration emanating from multiple *I-positions*.

Career counselling can also entail the deconstruction of existing delimiting discursive practices of the dialogical self in context. Albeit beyond the limits of this paper to elucidate, the theory of dialogical self stands as a discursive mechanism which explains how that complex relationship would operate. The nexus of the discursive worlds and systems of career influences of the client and counsellor (Patton &
McMahon, 2006a) brings enhanced focus to the potential emancipation roles and responsibilities of the career counsellor. The obverse also holds true, in that the counsellor’s personal influences and engagement with professional discursive practices may limit the client’s development (McIlveen & Patton, 2006). From this view, the counsellor must ensure that the counselling process generates sufficient movement between I-positions and dialogical exchange so as to ensure a rich and diverse career story, as opposed to a limited story founded upon constrained dialogue. This may involve the introduction to the client of new discourses that are present in the world-of-work or the generation of new I-positions that open up alternatives in the dialogical exchanges inherent to career counselling.

Conclusion

The Theory of Career Construction is a broad framework of career, and this subsection is an acknowledgement of its substantial theoretical capacity. It is suggested, nevertheless, that the theory of the life themes component is in need of elaboration. Dialogical self is proffered as a psychological construct which can augment the theory of life themes. Whilst the notion of life themes theoretically accounts for the meaningful “why” of career, dialogical self provides a theoretical solution to problem of “how” that meaning is psychologically constructed into themes and stories by a person.

The Theory of Dialogical Self holds that a person’s identity is brought into being through conversations. These constructive conversations may not necessarily be heard or audible: they may be imagined or symbolic. The co-constructive interlocutor may not necessarily be another person; it may be the same person in dialogue with himself or herself from a different I-position. The conversations may be populated or mediated by voices other than the individual’s own—the so-called collective voices of the others: the
cultures. An individual’s I-positions are defined in space and time: each is located in a past, present and future.

The Theory of Career Construction purports that an individual’s career story and life themes are the crucial nodes of connection between the elements of vocational personality and adaptability. Hence, as suggested by Patton and McMahon (2006a), career development occurs with the individual’s construction of meaning around the multiple career influences which are inherent to life. Dialogical self, with its multiple I-positions and voices, has the capacity to author and narrate diverse life stories. Thus, it is of theoretical relevance to the construction and co-construction of life themes and their generation through conversations.

Within the career theory and practice literature, the alignment of dialogical self with the life themes component of the Theory of Career Construction, and other constructivist approaches, offers promising avenues of exploration for practice and theory. Applying the notion of dialogical self to counselling practices may facilitate the development of new narrative counselling procedures (e.g., My Career Chapter). To extend the proposed connection between the notion of life themes and dialogical self, it could be fruitful to investigate its application to the narrative counselling approaches, with theories that could be subsumed by the theory of life themes (e.g., Cochran, 1997). To explore the potential for theoretical convergence (cf. Savickas & Lent, 1994) amongst other constructivist theories of career which posit psychological mechanisms of narrative construction (intentional action in Young & Valach, 2004), it may be useful to discover junctures at which dialogical self and the theories converge, and then consider how, in combination, they add to our understanding of career.
Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this research project has completed several tasks. Firstly, it has described the development of a new career assessment and counselling procedure, which has demonstrated that the procedure has considerable potential for further developments and application in research and practice. Secondly, it has described the users’ experiences of the procedure as a way to investigate its process and impact. Thirdly, it has explicated qualitative research methods that are of potential benefit to the research community. This research project has aligned extant vocational psychology theory and practice; and it has contributed psychological theory to the mix of what is an intellectually and pragmatically exciting field.
APPENDIX A:

PARENTHEtic CONSIDERATIONS
Parenthetic Considerations

To explain how a philosopher’s most remote metaphysical assertions have actually been arrived at, it is always well (and wise) to ask oneself first: what morality does this (does he - ) aim at? (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 37)

No disciplines emerge from nor exist in an intellectual vacuum; they inherently develop within and under the influences of their context. Kuhn (1970) wrote:

No natural history can be interpreted in the absence of at least some implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief that permits selection, evaluation, and criticism. If that body of belief is not already implicit in the collection of facts—in which case more than "mere facts" are at hand—it must be externally supplied, perhaps by a current metaphysic, by another science, or by personal and historical accident (pp. 16-17).

Following on from Kuhn’s claim and the acknowledgement that concepts and arguments from other disciplines may invigorate theorising (Russell, 2001; Young & Collin, 2000), this chapter contains two critical essays: Postmodern Apostasy and Traffic Police for the Invisible Hand.

As parenthetic considerations, the essays represent the author’s intellectual rationalisation for his positioning throughout this research project. In effect, they represent a partial explication of the author’s *epoche* (Ponterotto, 2002); essentially, they are my means of publicly stating my position, so that you—the reader—know where I stand with respect to the broader formulation of this research project. As foundational intellectual arguments of the research project, the essays demonstrate critical use of the literature as a fundamental process of the endeavour of formulating
the problem and questions of qualitative research (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). They arise from a critical-ideological paradigm for qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005) and speak to an aspiration to conduct research that values the ethic of reflexivity (Haverkamp, 2005). Whilst their arguments spring from a critical-ideological perspective, they serve to “locate” (Ponterotto, 2005) this research project within constructivism. Finally, they are an additional lens through which this dissertation may be read, understood, and, criticised.

The first essay presents an argument that traditional approaches to psychological science are not the ultimate form of knowledge generation; and that other forms of psychological science, founded upon different epistemological assumptions, are at least equal and complementary ways of knowing. Thus, in order to ground the research project, the essay focuses upon the intellectual and historical conditions necessary for the emergence and presence of constructivism and social constructionism within the field of career development. This is later expressed through the qualitative research methodology and underpinning epistemology of the research studies. The second essay presents an argument that traditional approaches to career development practices are replete with potential for abuse of power and that an alternative power position should be presented; and one which recognises the inherent conditions of power sharing within the career counselling dyad.

Background to the Problem

Super (1957) posed the profound but ostensibly simple question: “Why do people work?” This is a fair question for a science of vocational psychology, because it supposes an observer looking at, and into, his or her subject of inquiry. Within the context of career counselling, an individual may pose their own question: “Why do I work?” Perhaps more profoundly, and individual may also pose the questions: of “Who
was I?”, “Who am I?”, or “Who am I becoming?”, or “Who or what can I be?”, whilst in the frame of career counselling. Answering these questions requires an individual to simultaneously take an objective view of his or her own subjectivity. Is it possible to address these questions within the process of traditional career counselling?

How does psychological science, and its practitioners, handle these questions given its emphasis upon objectivity? Traditional approaches to vocational psychology can certainly aid the individual by providing an answer from the vantage point of the scientist-practitioner’s operating as a career counsellor. Here, the answers provided by the scientist-practitioner counsellor are informed by scientific practices, such as structured interviews and psychometric testing, which are embedded within the field of a scientific theory of the person and career. However, practitioners of traditional vocational psychology, acting through the paradigms of empirical, logical-positivist psychological science, cannot genuinely address these questions for the person, because by virtue of their objectivity they are prohibited from entering the phenomenal world of the individual: to do so would be an epistemological violation. Empathy, so core to the counselling process, is ipso facto a violation of the paradigm; or otherwise, a façade well constructed by the scientist-practitioner. Ethical objectivity in the counselling process is a partial solution for the problematic of supervening answers; however, objectivity concomitantly exacerbates the separation of the psychological worlds of the two interlocutors and further diminishes the counsellor’s capacity to engage in the phenomenal life of the client.

All of this presents a vexatious two-fold problem for the practice of career counselling: how can a counselling system facilitate the client’s answering his or her own questions without concomitantly supervening the counsellor’s objective answer? Alternatively, how can a counselling system facilitate the client’s answering his or her
own questions whilst actively accepting, if not welcoming, the inevitability of the
counsellor and client sharing and interweaving spoken realities through the ineluctable
dialogical exchange of counselling? This thesis will argue that the former question will
always be answered in the negative; so long as the question seeks an answer from the
purview of traditional theories and methods of vocational psychology. In opposition,
this thesis will argue that career counselling is an inter-subjective process, transcendent
of the counselling dyad, and dependent upon the construction and co-construction of
narrative.

Postmodern Apostasy

The epistemological foundations, methods of knowledge generation, and the
body of accumulated knowledge and practices of the discipline of psychology, have
been brought into question to such an extent that a significant paradigm shift has been
The arguments for this shift have also been reiterated in the literature pertaining to
counselling psychology (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992; Rigazio-DiGilio, 2001).
Mahoney and Patterson (1992) summarised these changes in counselling psychology as:

1. A decline in authority-based theories of knowing or epistemologies.
2. An abandonment of the assumption that humans are passive organisms
   whose actions are solely reactions to environmental stimuli.
3. An abandonment of a mechanistic, billiard-ball determinism in favour of
   complex, participatory models of reciprocal determinism between an
   organism and its environment.
4. An abandonment of the search for a “prime mover” among behaviour, affect,
   and cognition.
5. A recognition of the necessity of regarding an organism in its entirety.
6. An acknowledgement of the psychological aspects of all knowing (p. 684).

Career counselling practices and the epistemological foundations of the theories
upon which they are founded have been likewise brought into question (e.g., Collin,
1997; Collin & Young, 1986; Collin & Young, 2000b; Mahoney & Patterson, 1992;
Patton & McMahon, 1999; Richardson, 1993; Roberts, 1977; Savickas, 1993, 1994b,
1995b; Woodd, 2000). This juxtaposes criticism of the career development field for its
apparent lack of communication with other intellectual disciplines (Betz, 2001; Collin &
Young, 1986; Fouad, 1994; Hackett, Lent, & Greenhaus, 1991; Patton & McMahon,
1999; Russell, 2001) and, at its worst, “disciplinary ethnocentrism” (Richardson, 1993,
p. 425). The criticism has been heeded, with some scholars calling for co-operation
with other disciplines and mainstream psychologies (Fouad, 2001; Gottfredson, 2001;
Savickas, 2001a). All of this criticism inexorably requires an analysis of career
development practices and theories in view of their progenitor traditions. To do this
requires inspection of traditional psychology as a science and a practice.

Traditional Psychological Science

The emergence of “modern science”, as distinct from classical traditions,
occurred in the seventeenth century during the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment
(Russell, 1946). In his history of modern science, Bertrand Russell described the
attitude of the modern scientist as being distinctive in not what he believes, but how and
why he believes it [male pronoun retained]. This attitude presupposes two features:
firstly, the suspicion, if not rejection, of traditional dogma or authority (e.g., of the King
or Church); and secondly, the emphasis upon the acquisition of observed evidence that
could answer questions, or prove or disprove hypotheses. This attitudinal position is the
bedrock of the ethos of modern science.
In their text on research methods for undergraduate psychology students, Neale and Liebert (1986) described the requisite attitude of a good [psychological] scientist: “The scientist must be a sceptic who has to be shown, a doubter who must be convinced, a cynic who believes that people may wittingly or unwittingly deceive or misunderstand one another” (p. 9). From its early beginnings, the evolution of modern science included the refinement of its philosophical foundations and its logic of discovery: the reformed inductive method, empiricism, logical positivism, the hypothetico-deductive method and falsificationism (Oldroyd, 1986; Richards, 1987).

A key feature of the evolution of modern science was the emergence of disciplines that took the human being as their subject of study. In his archaeology of human sciences, Foucault (1970) argued that “man”—the human being as a discrete organism aware of its own identity as separate from the external world—had come into focus during the modern epoch of Enlightenment because the human being had become the basis and source of knowledge (as distinct from other authorities such as God and Church).

The epistemological foundation of positivism refers to several key tenets and these include: (a) there is a unity of scientific method; (b) science objectively studies reality, which is external to itself and corresponds to its theories; (c) observation of reality; (d) neutral observation and judgement, free from bias; and (d) scientific knowledge is useful in the real world (Delanty, 1997). With respect to the psychological sciences, logical positivism posits the following assumptions:

1. People can be studied separately from their environments; people can be subdivided into categories for study.
2. Human behaviour can be objectively observed and measured; behaviour operates in a lawful, linear fashion; cause and effect can be inferred.
3. The tradition of the scientific method is the accepted paradigm for identifying facts about human behaviour.

4. The contexts (environments) in which people operate are considered neutral or relatively unimportant; thus, the focus of inquiry should be observable actions of human beings (Brown, 2002a, pp. 12-13).

It is axiomatic that psychology, as the predominant, western, psychological science, has evolved into a monolithic intellectual discipline and a global industry with a presence in the everyday life of individuals; intangibly, as knowledge, and tangibly, as products and services derived from scientific technologies. Psychology is omnipresent; it is in universities, schools, hospitals, clinics, sporting fields, employment recruitment agencies, bookstores, television, radio, newspapers, and everyday conversations. Casual observation of bookstores alone indicates the depth of the market for “pop psychology” and more “serious” literature on the psychology of living an ordinary life. Here one can witness the multiple discourses of psychology at large.

Despite being a leading philosopher of science and an exponent of its value to society, Bertrand Russell (1992a, 1992b) heralded the collapse of belief in modern science as a force for good because of the potential for its misuse for harm. Russell’s papers were originally published in 1952 and 1955 in the context of the nuclear devastation of Japan and the build-up of nuclear weapons for the Cold War—hence his concern for the future of humanity, and science’s role in that future. Nevertheless, Russell’s position was clear in reference to science: the world had changed, the world was different, and something needed to be done. He called for new ways of understanding and being in the contemporary world for the sake of public good and human survival. Without abandoning his own faith in science and scientists, Russell called for the human sciences—psychology—to offer new ways forward. There could
be no better example of a genuine attempt to address this problem than in the work of
the pre-eminent intellectual B. F. Skinner who explicated the use of (modern)
behavioural science to transcend human misery and to establish a safe, democratic
world in which to live (Skinner, 1948, 1971). Nevertheless, Russell’s exhortations for a
new way using the human sciences would not be sufficient to hold back the tide of
scepticism that was to change radically the epistemology, philosophy, and practices of
human sciences and psychology. Skinner’s (1971) *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* was
savaged as a work of fascist proportion (Bjork, 1993). Whether the criticism of this
work was wellreasoned or fair is moot; nevertheless the vehemence of the attacks upon
the work was demonstrative of a turning away from traditional intellectual institutions,
and in this case, modern, logical-positivist, empirical behavioural science. Moreover,
the work and the criticism highlight psychology’s foray into the world of the ordinary
person and its overt proffering of the discipline as a means of constructing and
controlling humanity.

*Alternative Pathways to Theory*

Given the complexity and reactivity of a single person, or even more broadly,
humanity, then any human science that purports to study the person, or people, should
recognise the need for research methods that respond to their complexity and reactivity;
and in doing so, allow space for research methods that may not conform to traditional,
pure, experimental scientific methods that rely upon the rarefied conditions of the
laboratory (Richards, 1987). This does not herald the onset of intellectual barbarism
and the abandonment of rigorous scientific method—a loss feared by adherents of the
logical positivist paradigm for career theory (Savickas, 1995b). Instead, it calls for
concentrated effort in developing alternative systems of conducting scientific
psychological research (Borgen, 1992).
The diminution of one paradigm and the ascendancy of another is an important feature of modern science and an indicator that the body of knowledge is progressive in its evolution. "To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact never does, explain all the facts with which it can be confronted" (Khun, 1970, pp. 17-18). In reading Kuhn’s text, one could be forgiven for thinking that a scientific revolution was a reasonable process situated within a competition to best explain the data and phenomena under scientific study; and that the paradigm with the best explanatory power and capacity to generate new hypotheses and techniques, won the day. However, the notions that the accretion of knowledge of scientific disciplines continued in an orderly fashion and that they progressed by the replacement of theories by superior theories toward the end goal of ultimate truth, were found to be false (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Closer inspection of Khun’s analysis reveals an allusion to the process of their social and political extinction; or more specifically, the extinction of the scientists whose paradigm lost favour. Khun suggested that adherents of the “old” paradigm simply disappeared through slow attrition (e.g., retirement, failure to gain research grants). This feature of Kuhn’s analysis is critical to a postmodern slant on science, for it reveals a distinctly human and political context to modern science.

Foucault’s criticism of science and scientific methods, and of the human sciences in particular, revealed a compelling perspective of paradigms, including their development, articulation and rejection (Foucault, 1970, 1972; McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault advanced an alternative to Kuhn’s (1970) notion of a paradigm-shift by arguing that the knowledge received and accepted in a particular discipline was controlled by the discourse, traditions and institutions of that particular science. Discourse, for Foucault, was not just the language of the discipline at the level of
Discourse includes the institutionalised rules that govern language: its production, expression, and reception; how it is accreted; and how it is used as knowledge, thoughts, memories, meanings, measurements, and permitted hypotheses. For Foucault, discourse is a multidimensional, historically embedded, psychosocial phenomenon that has the power to create “reality” by its power to control the processes that form reality.

Given that “old” paradigms may not recognise the “new” phenomenon that the new paradigm “discovers” (i.e., brings into perception) and purports to “explain”, they are therefore, inferior and worthy of rejection. Foucault’s (1970, 1972) position indicates that it is this controlling capacity of discourse that maintains or diminishes scientific paradigms and it is the emergence of a new discourse, which could ably compete with the extant one, which allowed the possibility of a shift in paradigm.

Foucault (1980b) railed against “totalitarian” discourses that claim the right and power to determine what is, or is not, a science. His criticism is poignant given that psychology, as a human science, and its instruments, are, according to his thesis, not more than a vehicle of the discourse that brings them into being; hence the claims of one adherent over another are to be viewed with gimlet suspicion in this era of postmodernity. Foucault did not advocate the abandonment of scientific methods; instead, he called for awareness that one discipline or its variants had no particular privileged access to “truth”.

Feyerabend (1975, 1995) reinforced the argument that a multiplicity of methods and knowledges is preferable for the sciences. Feyerabend was not positing science as an admixture of disciplines devoid of methodological rigour in his assertion that “anything goes”. He (1995, p. 201) stated that “nothing is ever settled, no view can ever be omitted from a comprehensive account” and that “all methodologies, event the most
obvious ones, have their limits” (1995, p. 203). Feyerabend was suggesting that alternative methods of research should be considered and admitted into the discourses of the disciplines of sciences, and that any well-reasoned position should be granted a hearing.

**Postmodern Revision**

The saturation of the ordinary by psychology as an institution is important, not because of the success of the discipline per se: it important is because, rather ironically, the saturation has contributed to the emergence of a suspicious and critical attitude amongst contemporary scholars, who seek to deconstruct dogmatic worldviews and question their relevance in everyday life. For example, Smail (1999) and Dalrymple (2001)—despite their diametric views on the social and psychological causes of human misery—cogently point out the pernicious, omnipresence of psychology, its professions, attendant professional activities, discourses, and their impact upon the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of human distress in everyday life. Richer (1992, p.118) has gone further and described psychology as a branch of “the police”, and the humanist and psychodynamic branches of counselling psychology as the “secret police”. In an ironic twist, the sceptical, doubtful attitude that originally distinguished science and scientists (Neale & Liebert, 1986) has been inverted to reflexively attack science through the lens of postmodern thought.

An intellectual insurgence that is critical of modern science and modern psychology is attempting to position a postmodern revision of psychology (Shotter, 1992). Lyotard (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. xxiv) described the term postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives”. In his Report on Knowledge, Lyotard concluded that people had lost faith in meta-narratives, or had come to view them with suspicion and cynicism. Grand narratives and meta-narratives can be conceptualised as broad-
sweeping systems of knowledge, or overarching stories, that are regarded as truths (e.g.,
religions, scientific paradigms, cultures) and which set the rules that determine the
legitimacy of knowledge and how it is properly communicated and received (Malpas,
2001; Ward, 2003). Lyotard’s argument suggested that the pre-eminence of meta-
narratives, which were traditionally promulgated by the powerful generators of society’s
knowledge (e.g., science, religion), had fallen from grace and were no longer
automatically accorded respect and privilege. Foucault (1980b) argued also that,
despite their productivity, “totalitarian” theories had stifled research and thinking and
had subjugated aspects of knowledge in recent decades; and that the hidden and stifled
were rising to insurrection through criticism. This insurrection has been regarded as
postmodern thought.

The terms postmodern, postmodernity, postmodernism, and postmodern thought
are difficult to define (Anderson, 1995; Kvale, 1992a, 1992b; Rosen, 1996; Ward,
2003). Their meanings can shift and take on nuances of the disciplines and theories in
which they are used. For the purposes of this thesis, Kvale’s (1992a) descriptions of the
terminology of the postmodern will suffice as they are situated in the context and
literature of psychology. Kvale (1995) suggested that the postmodern world is
characterised by a continuous change of perspectives and an abandonment of mandatory
frames of reference. Postmodernism refers to literary and artistic cultures of this
contemporary period of human history. Postmodernity refers to this contemporary
period of human history in which the belief in knowledge and science is lost: sometimes
referred to as the post-industrial era (Collin & Watts, 1996). Nascent postmodern
themes were evident at the end of the 19th century (e.g., Nietzsche, 1994, 2003); and as
two historical epochs, modernity and postmodernity overlap contiguously in time. It
should be noted, therefore, that modernity is not finished in time and in spirit
Postmodern thought (or thinking) refers to the philosophical reflection and discourse of this period of human history.

With respect to the relationship between postmodern thought and psychology, Rigazio-DiGilio (2001) summarised the foundational assumptions of postmodern approaches to counselling:

1. Individuals and families are self-organising systems that are self-renewing and self-referential.
2. Knowledge of one’s individual and collective selves and of the world is rooted within individually and socially constructed symbolic processes.
3. Morphogenic structures undergo holistic and hierarchical transformations toward broader arrangements, representing organisations of diversity that emphasise collaborative structures, distributed authority, and asset multiplicity and ambiguity (p. 199).

Rigazio-DiGilio’s summary suggests that an individual knows of himself or herself in a process of ongoing construction within a multiplicity of social and discursive contexts, with concomitant relativity of personal reality.

Alternative Worldviews for Career Theory

The notions of an era of postmodernity and postmodern thought are of particular relevance to this thesis and the era in which it has been prepared. A substantial number of authors have highlighted the changing world-of-work and have consequently suggested that the concept of career, and the theories, research, and practices of career development, may need to evolve and be embedded within the dynamic context of contemporary environments and be accountable to new paradigms (Amundson, 2005; Arthur, 1992; Bailyn, 1992; Baruch, 2004; Chartrand & Walsh, 2001; Collin, 1997; Collin & Watts, 1996; Collin & Young, 1986, 2000a; Guichard, 2005; Herr, Cramer, &

Storey (2000) neatly captured the core work-related issues of postmodernity and the post-industrial age: globalisation; deregulation of labour markets; privatisation; technological advances; changing employment patterns; changing organisational forms and structures; demographic and labour market changes; changing balance of work and non-work life; changing psychological contracts; increased job insecurity; and changes in education. The ineluctable influences of changes in the world and concomitant postmodern literature have ultimately engendered a rethinking and reworking of career.

Notwithstanding the obvious post-industrial changes, by way of caveat, there should not be an assumption of universality nor uniformity in conceptualising the new world-of-work, as there are many jobs, occupations, organisations, and careers which have not yet, or may not ever, transmute as a result of the milieu of postmodernity; say for example, those of the traditional public sector organisations (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005).

Lyddon (1989) described four root metaphors pertinent to the epistemological foundations of psychotherapy and counselling, and these included: mechanism, formism, organismism, and contextualism. Lyddon suggested that root metaphor theory pertained
to the construction of hypotheses, or more broadly, world hypotheses. According to Lyddon “world hypotheses are implicit metatheories that may be distinguished from the more explicit (and limited) hypotheses typically found in the sciences, in that they are ‘unrestricted’ in their subject matter or in the scope of the evidence they encompass” (p. 442). Thus world hypotheses are akin to paradigms (Khun, 1970), as being broad epistemological devices that facilitate the conceptualisation of theories.

Mechanism. Taken from the metaphor of a machine, the worldview of mechanism assumes causality, linearity, and predictability in human behaviour across antecedents and responses; this is typified by psychoanalytic, behavioural and cognitive-behavioural formulations (Lyddon, 1989). The social cognitive theory of career (Lent, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) and cognitive information-processing model of career-decision making (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002; Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 1996) exemplify the learning approach to career development. A significant criticism of mechanical theories is their incapacity to deal with the diversity of personal meanings ordinarily attributed to antecedents of behaviour associated with the behaviour (i.e., causes) (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Formism. The formist worldview is based on the metaphor of similarity and posits the notion that objects in the world can be organised according to their form (e.g., shape, colour, function), and is exemplified by the pioneering work of Parsons (1909), Holland’s trait-and-factor theories of personality and work environments (Holland, 1985), the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), and its recent formulation, the Person-Environment Correspondence Theory (Dawis, 2002). Whilst formism contributes at the level of nomothetic and nosological conceptualisation of behaviour (e.g., personality factors, psychiatric diagnosis), it is limited at the level of the
individual person who aims to determine meaning for his or her unique identity (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; McAdams, 1993).

**Organicism.** The organicist worldview assumes processes that underpin structural development and transformation over time toward a final integrated whole; and is thus teleological (Lyddon, 1989). Lyddon also associated systems theories with organicism, due to their assumption that individuals can be conceived of as an active, self-constructing, open systems of activity that seek a state of self-organisation. It is this assumed dynamic toward self-organisation that indicates the potential of systems psychologies to be teleological and thus developmental. Organicism is readily exemplified by the lifespan/lifespace theory promulgated by Super (1957, 1980, 1992) with its overt developmental assumptions. A more subtle example of organicism is the formulation of career according to chaos systems approach which assumes the person will move from stable state to stable state with intervening periods of instability, all the time aiming toward organisation (e.g., Bloch, 2005; Pryor & Bright, 2003a, 2003b). Whilst there appears to be a regular trajectory of human career development as espoused by Super and other developmental theories, this formulation has increasingly been brought under scrutiny for its incapacity to explain development in context of a postindustrial world and the nuances of persons who do not fit the theories range of explanation (e.g., white, male, middle-class) (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Patton & McMahon, 1999; Woodd, 2000). However, the teleological, chaotic systems perspective provides a robust theoretical vehicle for the unpredictable exigencies of the current world-of-work and individuals’ activities to sustain within it.

**Contextualism.** The contextualist worldview takes the position that whole individuals dynamically interact with their environment, which is likewise dynamic and in flux, and that an event can only be understood in context of time and space and that
context is a social construction, as distinct from the logical-positive view of environmental reality (Collin, 1996a, 1997). Contextualism conceives of the whole in terms of “a confluence of inseparable factors that depend upon one another for the very definition” (Lyddon, 1989, p. 443). The inherent dynamism of both the person and his or her context obviates the incapacity of psychological sciences which assume (a) order and predictability in the subject of inquiry and (b) that objective methods may capture the truth of the subject. Contextual theories of career are exemplified by the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006a), the Contextual Action Theory of Career (Young & Valach, 1996, 2004; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002), and the Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002, 2005). A shortcoming of the contextualist approach to career theory and practice is that it lacks the decades of research tradition enjoyed by the other major theoretical schools of thought.

Hermans and Kempen (1993) contrasted the four metaphors to highlight the epistemological and ontological benefits of contextualism. Mechanism would hold that a psychological event is caused in a linear stream of action and reaction, with focus upon proximal causes. Contextualism views this as too simplistic and presupposes a multiplicity of events across three sectors of time—past, present and future—and eschews simple formulations of cause-and-effect. Unlike formism, contextualism does not classify objects as if they are historical and without connection to surrounding objects in space. Like organicism, contextualism allows for the predictability or at least regularity of events in life; however, it is broader in its openness to the unpredictable and the personal meanings attributed to the unpredictable, and it does not necessarily assume teleological intentions. Furthermore, organicism has been criticised for its sequential, stage-based formulations of human development because these are socially embedded value premises (Steenbarger, 1991). During this so-called era of
postmodernity, with all its chaos, contextualism offers an alternative vision for psychological science and the theory and practices of career development.

Early protagonists for a postmodern turn, Collin and Young (1986) and Savickas (1992, 1993, 1994a, 2001a), alluded to the need for diversification in the epistemologies for vocational psychology, and the neglect of context in theory. Whilst eschewing another grand-narrative (Lyotard, 1979/1984) through agreement with the argument that no worldview is superior (Lyddon, 1989), it is asserted here that contextualism offers a partial response to the call for diversified epistemology. Contextualism calls for unique individualised explanations of person in time and in space amongst a multiplicity of events; and hence invites idiographic approaches to psychology in order to bring meaning and coherence to that flux.

Summary

Postmodern thought is centred upon the rejection of meta-narratives that superimpose a model for existence upon an individual, and also the re-telling or re-writing of new narratives that are specific, localised, and individualised (Kvale, 1995): the narrative is paramount for knowing and being. Anderson (1995) adroitly indicates the postmodern implication with respect to self-concept as a socially-mediated construction:

Instead of forming our ideas of who and what we are on the basis of the “found” identity fixed by social role or tradition, we begin to understand ourselves in terms of the “made” identity that is constructed (and frequently reconstructed) out of many cultural sources (p.10).

This dissertation was written in a traditional, structural style typical of the discourse of psychological science. Its form and presentation could not readily claim status as being postmodern per se; however, the critical thinking which has brought me
to this position is very much inspired by a postmodern critique of psychology. The conditions of postmodernity and postmodern thought subsume an inversion of a critical attitude and the challenge to predominant scientific practices and knowledges, and have three implications for this thesis. The first implication pertains to notions of self-concept and identity in the personalised re-writing and re-telling processes of the counselling experience; and these are core features of this research project as they are investigated as processes of career counselling techniques described herein. Secondly, the research described herein does not abandon science as a way of knowing, as the research explores contemporary methods of psychological science under the assumption that there is more than one way to do psychological science that would operationalise the epistemological assumptions of contextualism. The subsequent section on constructivism and social constructionism responds to this point, and it is further developed in a later chapter on this research project’s methodology. Finally, the research assumptions repudiate traditional models of psychological practice that have used empirical psychological science as the foundation of a social power within the career development industry. Consequently, the next sub-section of the parenthetic consideration criticises traditional approaches to career development practice and argues that they have colonised the existence of the ordinary under the aegis of science and doing good for the public.

Traffic Police for the Invisible Hand

This sub-section\(^8\) was written through the critical gaze of postmodern thought and serves as an example of the foregoing subsection *Postmodern Apostasy*. Savickas

recognised the attempts by vocational psychology to come to grips with the post-industrial era; however, apart from a few notable and stimulating works (Irving & Malik, 2005; O'Doherty & Roberts, 2000; Richardson, 1993, 2000; Woodd, 2000), researchers and practitioners of vocational psychology and career counselling have produced scant publications that reflexively turn on the torch of critical self-inspection. In the vein of critical psychology, which sets out to challenge traditional assumptions and practices of psychology (e.g., Austin & Prilleltensky, 2001; Baydala, 2001; House, 1999; Larner, 2001) this section presents an argument that raises doubts regarding the intentions of traditional career development practice with respect to their allegiance to the client of career counselling and calls for an alternative perspective for practice in which tacit assumptions underpinning power are made explicit. It sets out an argument that vocational psychology and career counselling are powerful social institutions that have the capacity to influence the lives of individuals, and are also concomitantly influenced by broader global forces that impact upon them and the people they purport to study or serve.

Traditional Career Development Practices

The early form of professional vocational psychology can be traced to the occupation of vocophy (Hartung & Blustein, 2002; Isaacson & Brown, 1993; Savickas, 1994b; Watkins Jr & Savickas, 1990). Vocophy was the scientific process of matching individuals to jobs (akin to the work of contemporary employment agencies). Savickas (1994b) suggested that the science of vocational psychology was born with the publication of Frank Parsons’s (1909) book, *Choosing a Vocation*. Since the publication of this seminal work, the central tenets have remained popular amongst researchers and practitioners of vocational guidance. The core of Parsons’s idea of vocational guidance has been expressed as:
First, a clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations, and other qualities. Second, a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages, and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work. Third, true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (1909, p. 5).

Despite almost a century passing since their emergence, Parsons’s ideas would not seem out of place in a contemporary text on vocational assessment—this is either quaint or concerning.

The theoretical and practical approaches to career development and planning have developed within the context of western, industrialised society, which has emphasised empirical science founded upon the mechanical, formist, and organicist root metaphors (Collin & Young, 1986; Lyddon, 1989). As a modern human science, psychology rapidly developed a panoply of scientific theories, scientific methods, experimental designs, sophisticated statistical methods, and scholarly journals that legitimised its position amongst the “real sciences”. Not only is the discipline a science on its own terms, its predominant professional practitioners—psychologists—are, or are at least exhorted to be, applied scientists; as they are trained “scientist-practitioners” or “scientifically-minded” practitioners who implement evidence-based interventions (Belar & Perry, 1992; Kaslow, 2004; O'Gorman, 2001; Peterson, 2003). Herr et al (2004, p. 49) echoed the terminology of the scientist-practitioner in relating to career counsellors as “applied behavioural scientists”. They emphasised the increasing sophistication of career counsellors as eclectic purveyors of proven, evidence-based techniques.

Despite the emphasis on evidence-based practice, Baydala (2001) convincingly argued that the research outcomes produced for the validation of psychological
interventions were suspect with respect to the construction of variables and procedures that would inherently find in favour of a particular technique and then highlight the application of these research outcomes to demonstrate superiority in the market.

Furthermore, Fouad’s (1994) major review questioned whether the scientist-practitioner model was actually being implemented with respect to evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. In addition, Murdock (2006) questioned whether there has been a sufficient theoretical account of the how practitioners actually do psychological science in counselling practice.

From its earliest beginnings, vocational psychology was deeply committed to logical-positive science. The practitioners of vocational psychology were likewise committed to the construction of a scientific profession. Savickas (1993, p. 206) eloquently described career counselling’s contribution to the scientism of vocational psychology:

While scientists were objectifying the world, counsellors objectified interests, values, and abilities with inventories, and used these inventories to guide people to where they fit in organisations. Thus, career development professionals participated fully in the societal move to increase domination of the subjective by the objective.

The psychological science and scientific practice of vocational psychology has endeavoured to generate sophisticated systems of classification and measurement. One of its notable achievements has been the comprehensive classification of occupations (Gore & Hitch, 2005). Vocational psychology is replete with scientific forms and its flagship of objective measurement is the psychometric instrument, otherwise known as a psychological test. Standardised, nomothetic psychometric methods have been predominant and many of these have been derived mainly from trait-and-factor theories,
which may be collectively reformulated as the person-environment fit paradigm (Rounds & Tracey, 1990). Holland’s (1973, 1985) theory, for example, explicitly relates personality type and environmental models through the assumption that “human behavior depends upon both personality and the environment in which a person lives” (p.27; p. 34) [original italics]. The trait-and-factor and person-environment fit theories have been prolific in their contribution to vocational psychology, with the number and variety of psychometric tests related to vocational interests being so extensive that it has been a challenge to comprehensively organise them into some coherent whole (Osipow, 1987). Moreover, the paradigm has been vigorously upheld as the source of viable forms of theory and practice (Swanson, 1996).

Within the empirical traditions of trait-and-factor and person-environment fit theories, objective measurement implied some level of standardisation in materials, administration procedures, scoring, and normative data. Objective instruments should also possess some level of acceptable reliability and validity so that the user may be assured that the test measures consistently the construct it is purported to measure. Standardised tests based upon a normative sample allow comparisons between an individual’s performance and that of a general reference group. All of these conditions upon the psychometric tool are the embodiment of modern psychological science founded upon the ideas of empiricism and the root metaphor of mechanism.

Typical examples of objective instruments have included aptitude tests, achievement tests, interest inventories, personality inventories, values inventories, career maturity inventories, and self assessment instruments (Temple, 1995). Aptitude tests measure specific skills, particularly in relation to work (e.g., typing speed). Achievement tests tend to measure broader abilities such as knowledge, reading, writing, and arithmetic. Personality inventories assess traits and factors, or consistent
features of an individual’s personality. These are commonly used to determine fit to an occupational choice or setting. Values inventories measure specific attitudes/beliefs that are priorities in terms of a person’s personal satisfaction. Career maturity inventories measure an individual’s ability to make career decisions in reference to their normative group. Self-assessment instruments assist individuals to understand “who they are” in terms of specific characteristics (e.g., strengths).

Objective assessment has been used for prediction, discrimination, monitoring, or evaluation (Herr, 1988; Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). Prediction involves the use of assessment in the determination of an individual’s likelihood of success in educational or occupational options. In this way, prediction determines the presence of aptitudes that may be enhanced or avoided, with the ultimate aim of achieving desired performance. For example, measurement of an individual’s visual abilities may be used to assist in their planning for a career in aviation as a test pilot; the implication being that high visual ability is desirable in pilots, whereas, poor visual ability is not.

Herr (1988) has suggested that discrimination is the determination of values, attitudes, interests, or preferences that correlate (or otherwise) with particular occupational or educational environments. Discrimination is not simply about the performance of a skill or presence/absence of a trait necessary for a particular occupational environment: it is more pertinent to determining how comfortable a person would be in a particular environment. In this way, our prospective test pilot would have shown a preference toward risky environments; whereas a preference toward secure, low risk environments would be contraindicated.

Monitoring an individual’s readiness or ability to make sound decisions relates to their choices of educational or occupational activities Herr (1988). This career-maturity would be necessary for an individual to wisely take stock of all their personal
and environmental conditions and effectively arrive at some judgement or decision. Our test pilot would be quite confident of a decision that took into account all the necessary mental, physical and social skills needed to fly, and would be able to commit to such a choice.

Herr (1988) suggests that evaluation is determining the process or outcome of the career counselling or guidance that an individual/group has received: in this sense, evaluation is a method of quality assurance. Indicators of evaluation may include enhanced knowledge, skills, insight, or behaviour in relation to an educational or occupational aim as a result of working through a career guidance program. Here, our test pilot would have gained a clear idea of personal skills, knowledge, and compatibility with the aviation industry, and would trust the decision process. Ineffective guidance would have left the test pilot ignorant and lacking confidence.

Vocational testing expanded during World Wars I and II because of the need to classify soldiers for military purposes and later for their re-entry into civilian life (McCrossin, 1994; Temple, 1995). The field of vocational testing and trait-and-factor research continued after the second war and was also known as the “actuarial counselling” or the “Minnesota point of view”, because of the work emanating from that university (Sharf, 1997, p. 26).

Vocational assessment in the educational setting has been used for selecting courses during an educational program to structure that program in such a way as to achieve the best learning outcomes (e.g., subject selection) and for future planning of educational programs (e.g., post-compulsory, postgraduate).

Vocational assessment has been increasingly valued by commercial industries for their relevance to employee satisfaction, organisational productivity, and national development (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004). This form of vocational assessment may
involve use of psychometric measurement of general intellect, specific aptitudes (e.g., psychomotor speed), interests, values, or attitudes. Typically, vocational assessment in this setting has been driven by the needs of industry (i.e., the employer; and responded to by psychological scientists with commercial motives). In this way, selection of an employee for a job that requires specific skills and attributes may involve candidates’ completing assessment procedures according to skill and attribute. For example, a position of typist may require assessment of candidates’ psychomotor co-ordination; or a position of manager may require assessment of candidates’ attitudes relating to teamwork.

Psychometric assessment in vocational psychology has been overly focused upon the “big three”: interests, needs/values, and abilities (Swanson & D’Achiardi, 2005, p. 353). Psychometrics tests’ widespread utility is legendary because Anastasi (1988) boldly wrote that “nearly every type of available test may be useful in occupational decisions” (p. 450). The omnipresence of psychometric testing is demonstrated by their application in human resource recruiting: for example, approximately one million Self-Directed Searches are administered annually by a recruitment service of the United States armed forces (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004)—this is but one organisation! The proliferation of psychometric testing is being driven not only by individual practitioners of traditional models of career development, but additionally by human resources consulting firms whose interests are with their own profits and the corporate success of their client-organisations (Melamed & Jackson, 1995).

Reification: Diagnosing the Ordinary

Theories and practices of vocational psychology have been brought into question through postmodern thought and its adherents’ concomitant scepticism of authority and
predictability of career and the world-of-work (e.g., O'Doherty & Roberts, 2000; Richardson, 1993, 2000); and this has not been a recent phenomenon (e.g., Borow, 1974; Roberts, 1977). Within the sphere of career development, this scepticism is exemplified in the rejection of models of vocational assessment, which, under the aegis of applied science, assert their capacity to “measure” and “predict” a person’s career through psychometrics and objective techniques (Bradley, 1994).

It should be noted, however, that the trait-and-factor approach is not the only paradigm in question. Rounds and Tracey (1990) quite rightly indicate, in their defence of this approach, that other forms of counselling rely heavily upon similar assumptions and methods (Isaacson & Brown, 1993). Moreover, the epistemological bases for alternative paradigms, inspired by postmodern thinking that there is no verifiable truth “out there” but instead there is a viable truth that is pragmatic for the client (e.g., constructivist psychology), have also been criticised (Erwin, 1999). In addition, some adherents of the postmodern revolution may unwittingly cling to modernist assumptions (O'Doherty & Roberts, 2000).

The knowledge generated by traditional psychologies and psychometric instruments per se is not the primary sources of contention in this thesis. The argument lies with the professional discourse that a career development practitioner can “objectify” and “manage” the career of an individual with all the trappings of science and technology.

This critical argument is informed by the polemics of House (1999) and Smail (1999) who cogently demonstrate the presence of a self-serving ideology within the field of psychotherapy and counselling. House was not anti-therapy: his argument was with the institutionalisation of psychotherapy and its creation of a power discourse for the purpose of sustaining itself, and the failure of the profession to self-reflect critically.
Following Parsons’s (1909) notion of reasoning the fit between oneself and an occupation, the trait-and-factor approach posits five assumptions for theory and practice (Isaacson & Brown, 1993):

1. Vocational development is largely a cognitive process in which individuals use reasoning to arrive at decisions.
2. Occupational choice is a single event.
3. There is a single right goal for everyone making decisions about work.
4. A single type of person works in each job.
5. There is an occupational choice available to each individual (p. 23).

Minimal consideration of these assumptions would indicate their potential for irrelevance in the contemporary world of work (Storey, 2000) and the seemingly chaotic nature of career development (Bloch, 2005; Bright & Pryor, 2005; Bright, Pryor, & Harpham, 2005; Drodge, 2002; Gibb, 1998; Pryor & Bright, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005), in which career “choice” is irrelevant amongst the contingencies of socio-economic class and concomitant limitations upon career opportunities (Gottfredson, 1981; Roberts, 1977).

Isaacson and Brown (1993) point out that these assumptions are worthy of rejection if taken literally. Despite their legitimate caveat, these assumptions were the foundation of a corpus of professional practice, which, until the relatively recent advent of postmodern thinking, enjoyed predominance without serious dissent. Furthermore, they arise from an ideology of career that assumes: (a) career is a purely individual endeavour; (b) a person is defined by their career; and (c) formal work is the highway to self-actualisation (Richardson, 2000).

The tide against the traditional paradigm was moving strongly in the 1980s and 1990s. Super (1992), for example, recollected the “fall” of trait-and-factor as being
partially energised by neo-Freudian and Rogerian psychologies of the 1950s “gnawing at the foundations of testing” (p. 57). Savickas (1992, 1993) also portended a shift toward subjectivity in the career assessment process because of the paradigmatic challenge to traditional empirical methods and counsellors’ interest in engaging in the phenomenal life of their clients. Furthermore, Kidd (1988) exhorted practitioners to eschew notions that vocational assessment was something done to clients by some expert, and advanced the position that assessment is neither labelling nor simply testing.

The trait-and-factor position has been repudiated and often sarcastically described as the “test-em and tell-em” approach (Coker, 1994; Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004; Prediger, 1974; Rounds & Tracey, 1990). This unfortunate term sounds out the scepticism and caution held by scholars and practitioners who do not necessarily prescribe to the traditional methods of vocational assessment that over-emphasise objectivity and psychometric tests, and moreover, their application in the context of counselling (Bradley, 1994; Herr, 1988; Isaacson & Brown, 1993; Kidd, 1988; Tinsley & Bradley, 1988). Groth-Marnat (1997), for example, highlighted that psychometric tests were at risk of being used merely as technological, clerical devices without appreciation of the unique phenomenology and context of the individual being tested. Sharf (1997) suggested that the over-emphasis on vocational testing in trait-and-factor counselling may be related to the inexperience of counsellors or the deceptive simplicity of the theory and practices.

As a practitioner, I have been concerned when clients come to career counselling with the expectation that I would respond to their request to (paraphrased): “give me a test and tell me what I should do for the rest of my life”; which echoes the concern raised by Hummerow (1991) who cautioned that psychometrics were only a small part of the process of career counselling. What has concerned me more is that clients
received advice from other psychologists, who, with good intentions of ensuring that the person received career counselling by referring them to me, perpetuate the powerful myth that a psychologist/career counsellor could indeed “give a test that will tell you what to do”; which is tantamount to predicting the future! This erroneous assumption is not a casual and flippant thought of a client or colleague; it is an indicator that psychometric testing and concomitant vocational counselling have emerged into discourse as being commodities and tools for the living of everyday life. All of this assumes an amazing power on behalf of the career counsellor and his or her swag of tests. It is pertinent therefore to contextualise this professional myth in the same criticism levelled at the use of power and discourse within psychiatry and clinical psychology.

From a Foucauldian perspective, power, discourse and knowledge are inseparable (McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault (1980a, 1980b) argued that “truth” is constructed through power and that the power is administered through the production of truth. Taken from this radical position, discourse can be seen to bring phenomena-for-observation into being. In other words, the subject of a science is constructed by the very discourse of that science. In his archaeology of the human sciences, Foucault (1970) adumbrates his theory that human sciences are inextricably embedded within the confines of discourse:

Having become a dense and consistent historical reality, language forms the locus of tradition, of the unspoken habits of thought, of what lies hidden in a people's mind; it accumulates an ineluctable memory which does not even know itself as a memory. Expressing their thoughts in words of which they are not the masters, enclosing them in verbal forms whose historical dimensions they are unaware, men believe that their speech is their servant and do not realize that
they are submitting themselves to its demands. The grammatical arrangements of a language are the a priori of what can be expressed in it (p. 297).

Foucault used medicine, psychiatry and clinical psychology as examples of how a professional, scientific discourse produces its subjects, that is, disease and mental illness, in their journeys toward scientific status.

The central thesis of Foucault’s (1970, 1972, 1973) argument transfers to the professional and scientific discourses of vocational psychology, and in particular, the “test-em and tell-em” approach to psychometrics and their purported capacity to measure. To measure! To measure what? To measure what they have brought into being – constructs of vocational identity, traits, factors, types. This argument applies to the arena of career and work in which diagnostic formulations are made upon client’s presenting problems in the person-environment approach to career counselling (Holland, 1985, pp. 138-139; Holland, Magoon, & Spokane, 1981). Rounds and Tinsley’s (1984) review of the diagnostics of career problems contained an allusion to the need for a nosological system for the purposes of securing insurance claims; and they further claimed that research into career-intervention efficacy would be delimited by the lack of a nosological system.

If Rounds and Tinsley’s (1984) recommendations were to be accepted, then consider that in the parallel discourse of psychiatry and clinical psychology, ordinary problems of career choice or job dissatisfaction can be given a psychiatric diagnosis under the category of additional conditions that may be a focus of clinical attention: V62.2 Occupational Problem, or an alternative selection of diagnoses including 313.82 Identity Problem, or V62.89 Phase of Life Problem (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 685, 2000, p. 741-742). The very act of starting a new career is a criterion for the diagnosis of Phase of Life Problem! These diagnostic terms are patently
questionable, or, alternatively, they are representative of a scientific and professional
tradition that aims to control, through discourse, even the most ordinary aspects of life.

From a Foucauldian perspective, consider Gregory’s (1996, pp. 34-35) recollection of Thorndike’s classical positivist axiom that “whatever exists at all exists in some amount” and Gregory’s own assertion that “tests measure individual differences in traits or characteristics that exist in some vague sense of the word”; and moreover, he affirms the existence of traits in writing: “all people are assumed to possess the trait or characteristic being measured, albeit in different amounts” [italics added]. What exists, and what all people are assumed to possess, is nothing but the trait that the psychometrist reifies through his/her measurement system. These samples of text highlight the shift of thinking from the notion of measuring a theoretical construct to the measurement of a real thing in the world. Herein lies the power of the practitioner who uses psychometrics for the purposes of vocational counselling: that is, to hold the social position to observe and then to name, to confer identity upon the expressions, concerns, thoughts, beliefs, and hopes of the client (O'Doherty & Roberts, 2000).

Taken from the perspective of the critical view that psychometrists and their tests reflexively bring what they want to measure into reality, a portion of Gregory’s text (1996) ironically dismisses the logical positivist assumption that traits actually exist in the world, by writing: “there is a lesson here for test consumers: The fact that a test exists and purports to measure a certain characteristic is no guarantee of truth in advertising” (p. 36). If only that text were applied as a mandatory consumer warning on the front cover of every psychometric test!

In his study of prisons and society, Foucault (1977) explicates the role of the professional examination of a person and the use of documentation techniques as an expression of power to control and correct training for society’s needs. In this
argument, techniques of documentation refer to psychometric tests. When a client, who has been tested, states “I am an ABC type, therefore, I should work in XYZ environments”, the vocational assessment interview and the psychometric test have transcended to a new domain of influence; its coding and typing have been reified, brought into reality by the client’s own commission; the cycle of observation is complete through the testing and reporting – the client has been labelled. Consider, for example, the language used in this excerpt from an article which demonstrates the efficacy of a brief career counselling intervention: “working through the process of career selection may force these people to crystallise their self-concepts” (Taylor, 1986, p. 203) [italics added]. Two points are noteworthy; firstly, the notion of forcing individuals, and secondly, the clear objectification and classification of “these people”. After the point of labelling, the client can then be properly directed toward his or her most suitable occupational goals. Some clients may rightly dissent; however, what of those clients who acquiesce to the power of the objective, scientist, expert, highly-qualified, credentialled, government-registered, counsellor who, after all, has the best interests of the client in mind? This critical question juxtaposes literature on the clients’ influential ascription of expertise to counsellors (e.g., Paradise, Conway, & Zweig, 1986) and the power dynamics of counselling (House, 1999).

An example of how psychometrics has taken on an extraordinary status is their application in career counselling according to the Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). This predominant individual differences approach ostensibly seeks the view of the client in counselling with respect to his or her scores on psychometric measures; which in itself is a reasonable process toward client self-understanding. This takes on a triangulation process, with counsellor and client providing their perspectives against the psychometric data. However, the recommended process takes a curious turn
at the juncture of dissonance between the test scores interpreted by the counsellor and
the client's perceptions of the traits being measured. The recommended counselling
solution in the case of dissonance – do more testing!

Dawis and Lofquist (1984) recommend that both actuarial-prediction (based
upon psychometric data) and the clinical-prediction (based upon the interview process)
proffered by the psychologist serve the client equally well; however, they lend more
credence to the psychometrics in recommending that psychologists should advise their
clients to preferentially heed the actuarial-prediction; presumably because of its
scientific visage. This surreptitiously diminishes the importance of the counselling
relationship—despite the considerable interview process toward the establishment of a
working relationship and the collection of biodata. Dawis and Lofquist absolve the
counsellor of responsibility by reiterating that the career decision remains the
responsibility of the client and that this decision should be based upon the “best data
available” (p. 101). Reiterating that the client must live his or her own life and take
responsibility is not an unreasonable position. However, given all of the hyperbole
surrounding the actuarial process, it is disingenuous to blame subtly the client for a
failure of the technology to deliver its purported service.

Directing the Traffic

Despite the criticism of the “test-em and tell-em” approach, the value of career
counselling for getting on in life and career cannot be vitiated. There is significant
(empirical) evidence pointing to the benefits of the career counselling experience for
individuals (e.g., Miller & Brown, 2005; Swanson, 1995): so much evidence that in
recent years the socioeconomic value of career development has moved into the gaze of
international agencies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and
Development (OECD) and the World Bank. Both of these organisations have
recognised career development for its value to the individual, as a private good, and its value to national economies, as a public good (McMahon & Tatham, 2001; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002, 2003, 2004a; Watts, 2000, 2002; Watts & Fretwell, 2004). The OECD views career development as a public good for its capacity to enhance the economic productivity of nations, particularly through the knowledge economy. In addition, this international public policy literature juxtaposes a body of literature indicating the value of career development for social justice (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Hansen, 2003; Hartung & Blustein, 2002; Herr, 2003; McIlveen, Everton, & Clarke, 2005; O'Brien, 2001).

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of public policy and social justice initiatives for individuals; having seen that traditional models of career counselling have the power to “fix” persons’ identities, career development’s place in the knowledge economy and its favour with the OECD should be carefully considered in context of the ethical question: Who is the client? This suspicious attitude echoes Saul’s (1997) critique of the encroachment of corporations upon the sovereignty of States and moreover, the sovereignty of individuals caught up in the maelstrom of globalisation. Furthermore, this critical attitude reflects a circumspect view that global economic forces are impinging upon education, not for the sake of the individual, but for corporate success founded upon necessary labour supply (Law, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Is it possible that the profession of career counselling, in its breathless rush toward scientific status and to receive the accolades bestowed by the OECD for its contribution to the knowledge economy, will become a servant of corporate power, distinct from its original role of serving the good of the client individual?

Sampson (1987) implicated psychology’s role in contributing to the social construction of the person and the perpetuation of systems of power in society. Given
Richer’s (1992) claim that psychology is the police and that humanist and psychodynamic counselling are the secret police, then to which department of the constabulary does the “test-em and tell-em” model of career counselling belong in its role of shunting objectively tested and labelled workers into appropriate occupations and work environments for the public good and the national economy? The traffic police perhaps?

**Summary**

Although sceptical, this argument positions the assertion that the counsellor is an inherent component of the career counselling experience, profoundly involved in the construction of the individual client’s life through dialogue, and a component that must be vigilant in unpacking the assumptions of power and identity brought into the counselling environment.

The assertions presented in this section echo Foucault’s (1977) view of professionals as potential agents of the State, or at least powerful institutions, who, by the virtue of the corporate sanction, become legitimatised as the controllers of individuality. Furthermore, it highlights a cautionary note that practitioners of vocational psychology need to understand the dynamics of the individual client and their context (Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 1986, 2000a), and be fully aware of the power that they wield within the capitalist economies in which individual clients exist (Maranda & Comeau, 2000).

As with institutionalised psychotherapy (House, 1999; Smail, 1999), the theories, discursive practices, and counselling actions of career counsellors need to be brought into question. Furthermore, the counsellor’s knowledge of him or herself in the relationship is crucial. This is not simply a call to adherence with professional ethics. This pertains to the claim from Edwards and Payne (1997) that counsellors should be
critically self-aware and self-confess of their power in the relationship; and be fully conversant with the theories and discourses they are practising. Narrative therapy, for example, inherently deconstructs, in a Foucauldian sense, the client-counsellor power dynamics and gives voice to the person (Besley, 2002).

The practices of career counselling need to be reviewed with the aim of empowering the client through their lived reality of the world and their context; rather than an imposed reality constructed by the self-serving ideals of positivist psychological science and its practitioners with their attended self-serving biases (House, 1999). This assertion is subsumed by the call for a revision of the scientist-practitioner model toward a critical-practitioner model of practice (Larner, 2001) and inherently underpins the thinking of this research and the technique under investigation.

How does the discipline of vocational psychology and the practice of career counselling steer their way through this treacherous field laden with critical questions pertaining to their epistemological assumptions and their significant social and economic power? The root metaphor of contextualism (Collin, 1997; Collin & Young, 1986; Lyddon, 1989, 1995) requires the individual client and the counsellor to be considered as part of a recursively dynamic interacting system surrounded by higher order influences (Patton & McMahon, 1999), and in this dynamic the counsellor should not be privileged as the expert dispenser of truth (House, 1999). Furthermore, Patton and McMahon (2006c) and Reid (2006b) proffer constructivism as a promising intellectual and pragmatic vehicle to carry vocational psychology and career counselling further through this chaotic world-of-work, and, moreover, uphold the person-in-context, as opposed to subjugating the individual through the discursive practices of the vocational scientist-practitioner.
What is needed therefore, is an approach to career counselling that is reflexively and critically aware of its own discursive practices, integrates the narratives and discursive engagement of counsellor-in-context and client-in-context: one which seeks to open new vistas for the client that transcend the hackneyed castification of the so-called big three: interests, needs/values, and abilities.

Concluding Remarks

At the beginning of this Parenthetic Consideration, it was asserted that traditional psychological science and traditional practices of vocational psychology have been brought into critical focus. The argument suggested that the epistemological basis of vocational psychology and the institutional practices underpinning concomitant human services contained subtle flaws that have maintained a system of power relations and discourse that does not necessarily serve the client. At its worst, traditional approaches to career counselling assume the power to diagnose, classify, and predict the everyday being of an individual.

Contextualism, constructivism, and social constructionism stand as alternatives to the foundations of traditional psychological science and practices. Moreover, they stand as alternatives upon which to base the development of theory and practices of vocational psychology. These theoretical bodies allow theorists and practitioners to manage the serious questions raised by postmodern thought. They are at the core of this research project.
My Career Chapter:

A Dialogical Autobiography

PETER McILVEEN
Choosing or changing your career pathway is an important process. It can be exciting and challenging, but it can also be quite a lot of work. You will need to think about yourself in ways that will allow you to get a clear understanding of your career potential. Most of all, you will need to look at the big picture of your career and life broadly. Feeling your way through some options and trying on alternatives will require your commitment to being open to new experiences. The outcome of a wide career exploration will be a much better careerlife decision. The writing process you are about to complete will take you through your inner personal life and out to the broader influences of your career. The outcome will be a unique and personal story about you.

You will go through a series of steps from 1 to 7. Each step builds upon the previous one and goes toward completing this chapter of your career autobiography. To get you started, work through the first step containing some warm-up questions.

Step 1: Some Warm-up Questions

Answer the following warm-up questions in your mind. Don't spend too much time on each. Write some brief notes at the bottom of the page if you need to.

- Do you want to work in a rural or metropolitan area?
- How does the current employment market affect your career plan?
- How does current government policy affect your career plans?
- What level of financial security would you like for yourself?
- What role does your family play in your career plans?
- Have your career thoughts been influenced by movies, TV or music?
- What are your friends doing and how do their choices affect you?
- What work have you done and how has it influenced your direction?
- What skills are you particularly good at?
- What skills are you not so good at?
- What would be the ideal imagined future for you?
- What values do you have that would drive you away/toward a particular work?
- No matter how small, how would you describe your greatest achievement?
- What type of knowledge do you seek?
- What would you like to study?
- Do you have any illness that would change your career preferences?
- How does your cultural background affect your career thinking?
- How does being male/female affect your career choices?
- How does your career plan impact upon your personal relationships?

Notes:
Step 2: Pondering the Big Picture of Career

We know that career is not just about your interests and work. Every person has a unique career and one that is affected by a whole lot of different influences present in life—some obvious and others not. This second step will help you to see the big picture of your career.

The figure on the opposite page shows the big picture of career. See how there are influences that are quite personal toward the inside of the circle (eg, self-concept, skills) and see how there are influences that are about your interpersonal life (eg, peers). Even broader though, there are influences that reach all the way to your society and environment (eg, geographical location, employment market) depicted on the outer of the circle. All of these influences affect your career in some way, some more than others, and some not at all. See how the past, present and future has been included to indicate that the influences change over time. Also note the lightning bolts which symbolise how your career can be affected by chance events. Finally note how each influence is surrounded by a dotted, broken border; this indicates that in reality, the influences are not separate from one another, rather they overlap and relate with one another.

For now, just have a look at the figure and consider each influence for a few moments. You may choose to write some notes as you ponder the big picture of your career.

Notes:
Step 3: Compatibility of Personal and Social/Environmental Influences

Understanding your career broadly requires you to understand the big picture of your career in some more detail. Finding links between the influences of your career, shown in the previous diagram, can help you better understand the detail of your career. So before you go on to write the first draft of the manuscript of your career life, you should do a little creative brainstorming. You can do this brainstorming by seeing if each influence is compatible or incompatible with one another.

Step 3 will enable you to think about how your personal influences relate to your broader social and environmental influences.

Look at the matrix of influences on the opposite page. Notice how the personal influences run down the left side and the social and environmental influences run across the top from left to right.

Work your way across the matrix and compare each influence with one another. Are they incompatible or are they compatible? You rate any two influences with respect to their relative compatibility using a five point scale ranging from:

- Very much incompatible = -2
- Mostly incompatible = -1
- Neither compatible nor incompatible = 0
- Mostly compatible = +1
- Very much compatible = +2

An incompatibility would mean that they clash in some way. For example, you may hold strong Values about your choice of work and your Peers think you should do a career that is perhaps threatening to your values (e.g., you value the environment and yet your friends say that working for a mining company would be great). In this example, you would put -2 in the box intersecting Peers and Values because -2 would indicate that they are highly incompatible at the moment.

Alternatively, your Peers’ suggestions and your Values may be compatible in that you feel good about the mix of your work and values and confident to take on the career recommended by your peers; that is, there are no problems or inconsistencies and a +1 is put in the intersecting box. Work your way across from left to right, then go on to the next influence down on the left column.
Make notes of your thoughts, feelings, significant compatibilities and incompatibilities:

**Notes:**

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
Step 4: Compatibility of Personal Influences

Step 4 will allow you to consider how your personal influences relate to one another. Look at the matrix on the opposite page. Notice how the personal influences run down the left column and also run across the top from left to right.

Work your way across the matrix and compare each influence with one another. Are they incompatible or are they compatible? Using the same scale, you rate any two influences with respect to their relative compatibility using a five point scale ranging from:

- Very much incompatible = -2
- Mostly incompatible = -1
- Neither compatible nor incompatible = 0
- Mostly compatible = +1
- Very much compatible = +2

Work your way across from left to right, then go on to the next influence down on the left column. You do not put a number in the grey boxes because they are the intersection of the same internal influences (e.g., interests and interests).

An incompatibility would mean that two influences clash in some way. For example, you may hold strong interests in one particular topic but your health may not be well enough to allow you to express that interest. For example, you may be very interested in Antarctica, but you are prone to coughs and colds; so working there may not be realistic. In this example, you would put -2 in the box intersecting Interests and Health because -2 would indicate that they are highly incompatible.

Alternatively, your Health may be compatible with your Interests in that you feel well enough to work in any area in which you hold an interest. There would be no problems or inconsistencies and a +1 or +2 is put in the intersecting box.
Make a note of your thoughts, feelings, significant compatibilities and incompatibilities:

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Step 5: Writing the Manuscript

Now that you have overviewed the influences of your career and how they relate to one another, it is time to get on with the actual writing. There are a number of ways in which you can think about your career. The key is to trigger your mind into action. The act of thinking and then writing causes your mind to generate conscious and unconscious career planning processes. These processes have a cascade effect and from this you will be sure to think outside the square you are currently in.

The learning task you are about to complete is an important step in your career exploration. You are required to write a short chapter about yourself. The task is a little different, however, because you will complete sentences that have been started for you already. Each part-sentence relates to a specific part of your career—past, present and future. Your job is to complete the sentence whilst thinking about how it relates to you and your career.

Here is an example. Let us say that the sentence-part begins with “My friends say that I should….” You should complete the remainder of the sentence and make sure it mentions something about your career. In this example it could have been, “My friends say that I should go to university” or “My friends say that I should do what makes me happy, but I’m not sure what would exactly!” The idea is to let yourself write honestly, even if the sentence is confronting, or even if you are unsure. Write something!

After writing a past, present and future sentence for each influence, you will then estimate how you emotionally feel about each influence. This is done circling the most relevant description of how you mostly feel in relation to an influence: very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative. Very positive may indicate joy, excitement, or real confidence. Very negative may indicate anxiety, anger, or depression.

You will also complete a sentence on how much of an impact an influence has upon your career and life at the moment, by circling very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative, and then describing why it has such an impact. A very positive impact would mean that it is related to positive, successful outcomes, whereas a very negative impact would mean that it is having bad effects upon you.

Have a go. Remember what you are trying to do. You are not going to solve all of your career problems right now. But, you are going to give your mind a kick-start to brainstorming your career options! You are going to write a chapter of your own personal career autobiography. This will take some time—there is no need to hurry. You can refer back to the diagram and compatibility matrices of the influences to help you work through the story.
### My Career

**In the past, my career**

The main issue for me and my career at the moment is

I hope that in the future

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my career because

Career has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my life because

### Interests

**Some time ago I was interested**

I am interested in

I am keen to learn about

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my interests because

Being interested in things has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

### Skills and Abilities

**I was good at**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am generally good at</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to be good at</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my skills and abilities because</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Putting my skills and abilities to good use has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because</th>
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</table>

**Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past I really valued</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The most important thing in my life is</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>My most important values will affect</th>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my values because</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fulfilling my personal values has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because</th>
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</table>

**Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I once learned that</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>I know a whole lot about</th>
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<tr>
<th>I want to learn about</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my knowledge because</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gaining more knowledge has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because</th>
</tr>
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</table>
Age
When I was younger

My age allows me to

By the time I reach retirement I want

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my age because

My age has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

Gender
When I was younger I thought that

Being a male/female effects my

I believe that males/females should

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my gender because

Gender issues in the workforce have a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

Health
Health was

At the moment my health is

My health will

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my health
How healthy I am has a very positive / positive / indifferent / neutral / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Sexuality**

My sexuality has

An intimate relationship

In the future I hope

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my sexuality because

Having a successful intimate relationship has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Culture**

My cultural background has given me

I am

Other cultures could help my career by

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my cultural because

My cultural heritage has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Morals**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At school</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studying or training for a career is</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Future studies or training for me will</th>
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I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my education because

Study has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dreams and Aspirations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used to dream that</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>My dream is</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can see myself in five years time growing</th>
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</table>

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to dreams and aspirations because

Living out my dreams has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over the past few weeks I have felt</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>When I think about my career issues, I feel</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
I wish I could feel

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my emotional state because

How I feel has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Work**

My work experiences have taught me that

Work is

I hope to work

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my work because

Work has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Workplace**

Some time ago I thought that I wanted to work for

At the moment

An ideal workplace for me would

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my workplace because

The type of workplace I want has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Peers**

A friend once said to me
My friends think that

My future friendships

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my peers because

Close friends have very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Family**

There was a time when my family

My family says that

I expect that my family

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my family because

Family has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Community and Social Life**

For fun, I used to

My social life is

In the future, work and social life should

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my community and social life because

Having fun and enjoying my life has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Media**
I once read a story

I sometimes daydream about a TV program and think that I could

When I imagine the new

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to the media because

What I have seen in the media has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

Location

I came from

My home is

The ideal location for my work would be

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my location because

Location has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

Industry Trends

Past economic conditions

Current trends in the economy control

The industry in which I want to work

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to industry trends

Industry preference has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because
**Finances**

Money was

My current financial status allows me to

In the future, money

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my financial state because

Money has very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Job Market**

The job market was

The job market is

Future job prospects

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my job prospects because

Knowing about the job market has a very positive / positive / neutral / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because
Step 6: Proof Reading to Yourself and Back Again

There is nothing like proof reading to really understand a story and there is no better way to proof read than to do it out loud to an editor. You are about to do the final proof reading of your autobiography, but the process is a bit different. You are going to read it to yourself out loud as if you are the editor of your life story, but you are not going to read it to the you, as editor, who is here reading in the here and now. You are going to read it to yourself as you were five years ago; that is, reading it to the you, as editor, from the past. It sounds a bit strange and is a bit like a back to future experience, but it is an amazing learning process that will allow you to listen to yourself across time and build a magnificent story.

This is what you have to do:
1. Take a few moments to recall some details about yourself five years ago. Where were you living? Try to recall the sound of your voice, your hair, your face, and the sort of clothes you use to wear. It may be helpful if you find a photograph of yourself and sit it in front of you while you recollect your memories. Close your eyes for a few moments and recall yourself all those years ago.
2. Now go back to the beginning of the manuscript of your autobiography read it out loud and at the same time imagine that you are reading it to the five-years-ago-you. Do it now.
3. Now that you have read the manuscript, it is time to get some feedback from the editor—you from five years ago. Imagine yourself and your voice. What would you say to yourself now? Write your editorial comments in the spaces below while imaging it is the younger you doing so.

Editor's Comments:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Step 7: The Conclusion

The editor never has the final say on a manuscript. The author always gets in with the last word. Here is your chance to talk back to the editor. What would you—here and now—say to the younger you who listened to your story and gave editorial comments?

**Strengths**

My career achievements in the past

My current career strengths are

I will really shine when

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my strengths because

My strengths have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**Obstacles**

I was held back by

The main obstacles to my career success are

I am confident that I can overcome

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my obstacles state because

Obstacles have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

**The Future**

A few years ago, the future seemed

My career goals at this stage are

I want the next chapter of my career story to begin with

I mostly feel very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative in relation to my future because
The next few years have a very positive / positive / indifferent / negative / very negative impact upon my careerlife because

Final Notes

Congratulations; you have now finished this first edition of your autobiography, My Career Chapter. Keep this copy in a safe place. You and your counsellor will work through it carefully and discuss important themes and plots in your career story so that the next chapter is even more interesting and rewarding. Before you have your next appointment with the counsellor, you may experience spontaneous recollections, thoughts, feelings, or maybe develop a different view on your career and life. These experiences are important. Record them as notes on the next page.

Notes:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES AND QUESTIONNAIRES
### Consent Form for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chief Investigator:</th>
<th>Project Supervisor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peter McIlveen</td>
<td>Prof. Wendy Patton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, Careers</td>
<td>Head of the School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment &amp; Equity</td>
<td>of Learning and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of</td>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Queensland</td>
<td>Queensland University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 46312375</td>
<td>of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:mcilveen@usq.edu.au">mcilveen@usq.edu.au</a></td>
<td>07 3864 3562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:w.patton@qut.edu.au">w.patton@qut.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information sheet about the research project investigating the experience of using My Career Chapter;

- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction;

- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team;

- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;

- understand that you can contact the research team if you have any questions about the project, or the Research Ethics Officer on 3864 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if they have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and

- agree to participate in the project.

**Name**

______________________________

**Signature**

______________________________

**Date**

____ / ____ / ____

Please include this signed form in your confidential envelope.
Alignment with Recommendations Questionnaire

Verbal Consent Script (recorded at beginning of interview):
You have attended the training program for My Career Chapter and were given the opportunity to consider the theory and applications of this new career assessment process. You also completed My Career Chapter for yourself and were able to experience what a potential client experiences in completing it. This interview serves to investigate My Career Chapter’s alignment with the recommendations for the development of qualitative career assessment procedures (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003). I will soon ask you questions that relate directly to the recommended standards for qualitative career assessment procedures and your experience of using My Career Chapter. I am seeking your candid feedback on My Career Chapter. Your responses to this interview will be kept in confidence and you will be provided with a personal copy of the transcript upon its availability. The recordings and transcripts will be stored and later destroyed in compliance with the University’s records policy. You may stop the interview or withdraw from the interview at any stage.

[Name], have you been provided a copy of the Information Form for Participants?
[Name], have you signed the Consent Form to indicate that you agree to participate in this study?
[Name], are you ready to commence this recorded interview?

Ground the assessment process in theory
How does My Career Chapter relate to theory and which aspects of its application of theory stood out for you?

Test the career assessment process
How effective do you believe My Career Chapter would be as a qualitative career assessment process?

Ensure that the process can be completed in a reasonable time frame
What are your comments on the time it would take a client to complete My Career Chapter?

Design a process that fosters holism
How does My Career Chapter’s content and process stimulate clients’ to consider their career and career counselling in a holistic fashion?

Write the instructions for the client.
How do the instructions read with respect to their focus on the client?

Write readable and easily understood instructions.
How do the instructions for My Career Chapter read with respect to their clarity and directions?

Sequence logical, simple, small achievable steps
How does process of completing My Career Chapter progress with respect to being logical, simple and achievable?
Provide a focused process
How does My Career Chapter focus clients’ attention upon their career?

Provide a flexible process
How does My Career Chapter allow the client to direct their own exploration?

Encourage co-operative involvement of counsellor and client
How does My Career Chapter involve both client and counsellor?

Include a debriefing process
How does My Career Chapter facilitate the client to debriefing their experience with the counsellor?
Client Reactions to MCC

Take a moment to reflect on your experience of hearing and talking about your career story that you wrote in My Career Chapter.

Instructions
Review your writing of My Career Chapter. Try to remember what you were experiencing during the writing process. Choose the reactions below that best describe your experience, even if every part of the definition does not apply, or the phrasing is not exactly accurate. Please circle the number of the answer which best describes your level of agreement with each reaction statement. Please be sure to answer all statements.

Use this rating scale and circle the level of disagreement or agreement that is true for you:

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = disagree slightly
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = agree slightly
6 = agree
7 = strongly agree

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<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Understood. I felt that my career counsellor would understand me and know what I was saying or what was going on for me</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2. Supported. I felt accepted, reassured, liked, cared for, or safe. I felt like my career counsellor would be on my side or I came to trust, like, respect my career counsellor more.</td>
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<td>3. Hopeful. I felt confident, encouraged, optimistic, strong, pleased, or happy, and felt like I could change.</td>
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<td>4. Relief. I felt less stressed, anxious, guilty, and angry or had fewer uncomfortable or worrisome feelings.</td>
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<td>5. Negative thoughts/behaviours. I became aware of specific negative thoughts or behaviours, which cause problems for others or me.</td>
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<td>6. Better self-understanding. I gained new insight about myself, saw new connections, or began to understand why I behaved or felt a certain way. This new understanding helped me accept and like myself.</td>
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<td>7. Clear. I got more focused about what I was really trying to say, what areas I need to change in my life, what my goals are, or what I want to work on in career counselling.</td>
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<td>8. Feelings. I felt a greater awareness of deepening of feelings or could express my emotions better.</td>
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<td>9. Responsibility. I accepted my role in events and blamed others less</td>
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<td>10. Unstuck. I overcame a block and felt freed up and more involved in what I have to do in career counselling</td>
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<td>11. New perspective. I gained a new understanding of another person, situation, or the world. I understand why people or things are as they are.</td>
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<td>12. Educated. I gained greater knowledge or information. I learned something I had not known.</td>
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<td>13. New ways to behave. I learned specific ideas about what I can do differently to cope with particular situations or problems. I solved a problem, made a choice or decision, or decided to take a risk.</td>
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<td>14. Challenged. I felt shook up, forced to question myself, or to look at issues I had been avoiding.</td>
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<td>15. Scared. I felt overwhelmed, afraid, or wanted to avoid or not admit to having some feeling or problem. I may have felt that my career counsellor was too pushy or would disapprove of me or would not like me.</td>
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<td>16. Worse. I felt less hopeful, sicker, out of control, dumb, incompetent, ashamed, or like giving up. Perhaps I felt that my career counsellor would criticize me, pity me, hurt me, or treat me as weak and helpless.</td>
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<td>17. Stuck. I felt blocked, impatient or bored. I did not know what to do next or how to get out of the situation. I felt dissatisfied with the progress of career exploration or having to go over the same things again.</td>
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<td>18. Lack of direction. I felt angry or upset that my career counsellor didn’t give me enough guidance or direction.</td>
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19. Confused. I did not know how I was feeling or felt distracted from what I wanted to write. I was puzzled or could not understand what my career counsellor wanted me to write. I was not sure I agreed with my career counsellor.

20. Misunderstood. I felt that my career counsellor would not really hear what I was trying to say, misjudge me, or make assumptions about me that are incorrect.

21. No reaction. I had no particular reaction.
Client Construction of Change Scale

Instructions
The statements in this questionnaire refer to your feelings and thoughts about your career counselling and writing My Career Chapter, RIGHT NOW. Please read each statement carefully. You will probably agree with some of these statements and disagree with others. Each statement is followed by seven possible answers. Please circle the number of the answer that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement AT THIS TIME. Although some of the statements look the same, each statement is important. Please be sure to answer all the statements.

Please circle the number that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Use this rating scale and circle the level of disagreement or agreement that is true for you:

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = disagree slightly
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = agree slightly
6 = agree
7 = strongly agree

1. I think career counselling will help me handle the problem much better. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I am not sure I am capable of doing what needs to be done to solve the problem. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. There has been a lot of progress in career counselling already. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I will keep trying until things begin to change. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I doubt that the career problem will be much better when career counselling ends. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I feel confident in my ability to overcome this career problem. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. The career problem has not improved much since career counselling began. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I am willing to work hard to improve my career problem. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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9. I think there will be a lot of progress in career counselling.
10. I don’t think I’m able to make the changes necessary to improve the problem.
11. Compared to when career counselling began, the problem is now:
12. I may stop trying if I don’t see improvement in the problem.
13. Compared to when career counselling began, I think the problem at the end of counselling will be:
14. I’m not sure I can follow through with my goals in career counselling.
15. The problem is much less of a problem now compared to when career counselling began.
16. I will keep working to improve things even if I don’t see progress right away.

Please provide the following details:

Your age in years: _______ Your gender (circle): Female Male

Thanks for helping us to evaluate our services to you. Please place your feedback sheets in the envelope and hand them to the receptionist at your next appointment.
Clients Experience Questionnaire

Name: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Take a moment to reflect on your experience of hearing and talking about your career story that you wrote in My Career Chapter.

Verbal Consent Script (recorded at beginning of interview):
You have completed My Career Chapter. I will soon ask you questions that relate directly to your experience of My Career Chapter and I am seeking your candid feedback. Your responses to this interview will be kept in confidence and you will be provided with a personal copy of the transcript upon its availability. The recording and transcripts will be stored and later destroyed in compliance with the University’s records policy. You may stop the interview or withdraw from the interview at any stage.

[Name], have you been provided a copy of the Information Form for Participants? [Name], have you signed the Consent Form to indicate that you agree to participate in this study? [Name], are you ready to commence this recorded interview?

Overall Experience
Before we get into the details of your experience of each step of completing My Career Chapter, are you able to provide a general overview of your experience?

Step 1
In the first part you were required to do some warm up question. How did you find this experience?

Step 2
In the second part you were required to consider the big-picture of your career and use this figure to help you think it through. What was that like for you?

Step 3
In the third part you were required to consider how each of the influences in your career, as shown in the figure, relate to one another, and how they are compatible or incompatible with one another. What was that process like for you?

Step 4
In the fourth part, you were required to write the bulk of your manuscript. Can you tell me how that was for you?

You would have noticed that you were given space to write about each influence in career. How was that for you?

You also would have noticed that some of the sentence-part contained a past, present, and future element. What was that like to write?

There were also two sentence parts relating to the emotional importance and impact of career influences. What was it like to write to those sentence parts?

Step 5
In the fifth part you were required to imagine a younger you giving the present you feedback on your story. What was that like for you?

Step 6
You were given space to make a conclusion to your manuscript. How did that go for you?

Notes
You were given space to write notes. How did you use this space?

Reading with Counsellor
You have heard your story read out loud by the counsellor. What was the process like for you?

Connectedness
What have you come to understand about your own career story by completing My Career Chapter? For example are there any patterns or themes that you were not previously aware of?

What was it like for you to have the undivided attention of someone listing to your career story?

Reflection
What was it like for you to have a space where you could take time to reflect on your career story written in My Career Chapter?

Meaning-making
What new or different understandings do you have about yourself as a result of completing My Career Chapter?

Learning
What is the most significant learning process for you from completing My Career Chapter?

Agency
What steps may you take in your own life as result of completing My Career Chapter?
Helpful Aspects of MCC

Name: ____________________________ Date: ________________

Take a moment to reflect on your experience of hearing and talking about your career story that you wrote in My Career Chapter.

1. Of the events which occurred in this session, which one do you feel was the most helpful or important for you personally? (By "event" we mean something that happened in the session. It might be something you said or did, or something your therapist said or did.)

2. Please describe what made this event helpful/important and what you got out of it.

How helpful was this particular event? Rate it on the following scale. (Put an "X" at the appropriate point; half-point ratings are OK; e.g., 7.5.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HINDERING</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>HELPFUL</th>
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4. About where or when in the session did this event occur?

5. About how long did the event last?

6. Did anything else particularly helpful happen during this session?
   YES  NO
   a. If yes, please rate how helpful this event was:
      6. Slightly helpful
      __ 7. Moderately helpful
      __ 8. Greatly helpful
      __ 9. Extremely helpful
   b. Please describe the event briefly:

Did anything happen during the session which might have been hindering?

   YES  NO
   a. If yes, please rate how hindering the event was:
      1. Extremely hindering
      2. Greatly hindering
      3. Moderately hindering
      4. Slightly hindering
   b. Please describe this event briefly:
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