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Transition to Adulthood

Action, Projects, and Counseling

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Preface

This book is about how young people become adults and how counseling can help in that process. Becoming an adult, like so many other "becomings" in our lives, is a process. This process involves others. We do not become adults without the support and participation of others. Similarly, we do not write books without the participation of others. In this case, we wrote much of this text, but were aided by José Domene, Matthew Graham, and Anat Zaidman-Zait. These three individuals not only authored specific chapters, but were also centrally involved in much of the empirical research on which this book is based.

Transition to Adulthood: Action, Projects, and Counseling arose from several experiences and studies. Based on a number of our earlier studies, we conducted two qualitative research studies about the transition to adulthood. In one study we were able to follow 20 parent–youth dyads over a 6–8-month period. The second study involved young people and their counselors addressing transition to adulthood issues. These research studies were designed in such a way that we obtained data on what each young person and their parent or counselor did together to facilitate or, despite good intentions, hinder in some cases the transition to adulthood. Their joint actions invited an in-depth presentation and discussion, to which we hope we have done justice in this book.

The perspective and data we take in this book was supplemented by several other research studies conducted by the authors on a range of related issues with adolescents and their parents, including such issues as romantic relationships, adolescent peer relationships, health, career development, addictions, parenting, suicide, and with younger adolescents, Aboriginal families, couples, and others.

Finally, over a number of years in a variety of joint ventures, we have contributed to the development of the contextual action theory of career and to a distinctive qualitative research method, the action-project method, both of which are discussed extensively in this book. This approach goes beyond conventional theorizing and research in counseling. However, it responds to both contemporary research in neurology and attempts to overcome the theory–practice divide in counseling. It provides a ground on which practice-relevant theorizing and theory-based counseling practice can unfold. It is an approach in which practitioners and clients can link

their past and their future, enabling them to work on issues which matter in a way that is relevant to them.

What is particularly new in this book is that it represents our most extensive discussion of the use of contextual action theory in counseling. The transition to adulthood allows us a particular focus to discuss the dimensions of counseling from this perspective. But the application of contextual action theory to counseling is not limited to this population of young people or to the issue of transition. Counselors and therapists from a wide range of specialties and orientations will resonate with the perspective taken up in these pages.

In 1991, Ernest Boesch, the action theorist and cultural psychologist, predicted that action theory would make inroads in many areas of psychology. He suggested that in the case of counseling and psychotherapy, action theory would be particularly important. Boesch's prediction has been realized in a variety of ways, as there are now many approaches to counseling and psychotherapy in which aspects of this perspective are evident, for example, narrative therapy, solution-focused therapy, constructivist approaches, and relational counseling. While each of these is making distinct contributions, none has fully embraced a conceptualization and method based on action theory. This is what we have attempted to do in this book.

Because action theory addresses intentional goal-directed action, it is readily applicable to counseling. Counseling is first and foremost an action. In particular, it is a joint action.

This book is organized in three sections. The first section serves to introduce the topics of the transition to adulthood, contextual action theory, and counseling from this perspective. It also provides a description of the research method that guided much of the data and cases presented and discussed in this book.

In the second section, that is, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, we devote each chapter to a different theme that is represented in the transition process. Each of these chapters illustrates the theme with one or more case studies and, as appropriate, draws implications for counseling practice. The topics addressed in these chapters are broad, as are the issues that youth face in the transition to adulthood process, and overlapping. The chapters on relationships do not exclude identity issues, and vice-versa.

The third section of this book provides readers with some practical directions in engaging in counseling practice informed by action theory. Two aspects of particular relevance are working with narrative and interpretation, and the use of the self-confrontation is discussed in some detail.

We are indebted to a host of young people and their families who have contributed to this work as research participants or clients. We are also indebted to a number of professional counselors who gave us access to their work with clients. In addition, we have been assisted by a large number of graduate and undergraduate research assistants over many years who have contributed immeasurably to this work. They include Michelle Behr, Ashley Cavanaugh, Stewart Deyell, Yaari Dyer, Adam Easterbrook, Kristin Foulkes, Carla Haber, Bradley Kauffman, Celine Lee, Corinne Logan, Amy Mart, Serita McLelland, Jessica Nee, Carey Penner, Hajera Rostram, Wayne Spence, Alison Stevens, Becky Stewart, Laura Templeton, and

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Finally, we are indebted to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which has supported this work through several research grants over a number of years. The University of British Columbia deserves thanks for providing an intellectually stimulating environment for most of the authors. Equally, we acknowledge our appreciation to our partners and families for their support and understanding.

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24 February 2010

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Chapter 1
Transition to Adulthood: Introduction

The transition to adulthood involves, for most individuals, moving from school to work, establishment of long-term relationships, possibly parenting, as well as a number of other psychosocial transformations. These are not small changes in individuals' lives. Indeed, some aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as the establishment of long-term relationships or parenting, result in permanent or enduring transformations. The transition to adulthood is not only a period of "coming of age" but a time during which major choices are contemplated and decisions are made.

Supporting the transition to adulthood through counseling involves appreciation of the current social and political conditions as well as the central approaches or frameworks used to understand the transition to adulthood. This chapter begins by defining the transition to adulthood that guides each of the chapters in this book. Then, current conditions are outlined, pointing out the constraints and affordances individuals face as they plan for and move into adulthood. Finally, the disciplinary approaches to understanding the transition to adulthood are described along with a critical evaluation of these approaches and an explanation for using a new approach, action theory, in this book.

Definition of Transition to Adulthood

What is the transition to adulthood? It is the movement from childhood to adulthood. Or, the transition is the change from the category of child to adult. The "hoods" are age periods or stretches of time associated with age categories assigned to individuals within a particular culture. The importance or salience of age groups and the ages at which life periods begin and end varies widely across cultures. Cultural variations in age groups (see Project A.G.E., Keith et al., 1994) highlight how age periods or the "hoods" are socially constructed (Kessen, 1979).

In this book, the transition to adulthood is not viewed as a step from a lower stage (i.e., childhood) upward to a more sophisticated or higher stage (i.e., adulthood) as is implied by some psychological perspectives (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2004). Rather, childhood and adulthood are age periods across which developmental change occurs

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through both ontogeny and goal-directed actions of individuals and the people around them. These age periods are defined by the cultural settings in which individuals live.

Among researchers and practitioners in North America and Europe, the period associated with the transition to adulthood varies. Transition to adulthood is viewed by some as the period after adolescence and before entry into adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000; Nelson et al., 2007; Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004). For others the transition to adulthood is the period of adolescence (e.g., Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2005; Haase, Heckhausen, & Köller, 2008) or youth (e.g., Côté & Allahar, 2006) which refer to the period following childhood and prior to adulthood.

The definition of the transition to adulthood assumed in this book is focused upon the population of youth in North America. We view the transition to adulthood as beginning at the end of childhood and extending across adolescence. This preparatory period is a stretch of time and not an upward developmental change from one level of development to another (see von Glaserfeld & Kelley, 1982). It is the period of time during which individuals and the people around them are concerned with preparing for entry into the adult social, economic, and legal realms. This process generally extends across the second and part of the third decade of life.

North American Cultural Context

Interpretations of the current state of the transition to adulthood in North America include notions that children are "growing up too fast" or "growing up slowly." These two metaphors, although appearing incongruent, are related. The two metaphors and the associations between them are discussed next to illustrate the current North American cultural context.

Those who suggest that children are growing up too fast (e.g., Bjorklund, 2007; Elkind, 2001; Hymowitz, 2000; Postman, 1994) critically highlight the cultural tendency to hasten children into adulthood. Children are pressured into early academic achievement, expected to engage in complex decision-making processes associated with schooling and career tracks, exposed to media portrayals of sexually precocious young teenagers, and are targeted in marketing strategies to influence buying of goods ranging from clothing to media to their parents' automobiles. The pressure to grow up early is not accompanied by accelerated maturation. Rather, it seems that children may experience stress (Elkind, 2001) and increased chances of mental health problems (Bjorklund, 2007).

Although concerns about growing up too quickly have been expressed by researchers (e.g., Luthar & Latendresse, 2005) and practitioners (e.g., Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000), there are criticisms of this view. The central criticism is that the majority of children are not hastened through childhood and adolescence (Lynott & Logue, 1993). The idea of a foreshortened childhood is not born out in data from large samples. Nonetheless, the metaphor of growing up too fast appears in both academic and popular literature which suggests that it is salient in North American culture and is, for some, a concern.

The suggestion that children are growing up too fast appears, at first, to be incongruent with growing up slowly. But the two metaphors may be linked by the cultural context of achievement in North America. Growing up fast is, in part, about the attempts to accelerate learning and cognitive maturation in order to achieve in competitive academic and work environments (Bjorklund, 2007; Elkind, 2001; Hymowitz, 2000). Growing up slowly is centered on the lengthy academic preparation needed to succeed in an increasingly complex workforce (e.g., Arnett, 2000, 2004; Côté & Allahar, 1994; Larson, 2002). Time spent in educational institutions compliments the pressure to achieve. Lengthy education is perceived as ensuring a "good" start in the workforce with better economic prospects (Aronson, 2008a; Côté & Allahar, 2006; Kerckoff, 2002). Entrance into post-secondary education and that lengthy but profitable education comes with costs – including pressure for some to achieve in early school years (Elkind, 2001; Hymowitz, 2000; Luthar & Becker, 2002; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2000). In short, the two metaphors suggest that there is pressure to grow up fast in order to slowly, but (supposedly) successfully, enter adulthood.

The long transition into adulthood, or growing up slowly, has evolved over the past century. Several social and economic forces contribute to the emergence of the long transitional period. Formal educational systems have expanded accommodating more individuals for longer periods of time. Colleges and universities are no longer for the elite but are mainstream institutions. Along with the increasing access to education came the demand for more credentials as well-paid jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled workers began to disappear (Furstenberg, 2008). The relationship between school and work has been altered.

The transition from school to work has become tenuous due to declines in permanent employment and a paucity of formal pathways (e.g., apprenticeships) for youth (Furstenberg et al., 2005; Shanahan, Mortimer, & Krüger, 2002). The nature of the transition from school to permanent employment makes it difficult for most youth to gain the economic and psychological autonomy of their counterparts in the first two thirds of the twentieth century (Furstenberg et al., 2005). Economic autonomy is much more difficult for youth from lower social classes to attain with the decline in the influence of trade unions in securing well-paid jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled workers (Furstenberg, 2008). Youth from lower social classes face many more challenges to attaining education and establishing permanent employment than youth from middle and higher social classes (Côté & Allahar, 2006; Staff & Mortimer, 2008). Youth from lower social classes do not have the parental provision of material and nonmaterial assistance that enables the completion of post-secondary education or independent living enjoyed by youth from middle and upper social classes (Schoeni & Ross, 2005; Swartz, 2008).

Other markers of adulthood in North America are associated with household formation and family relationships. Compared to 50 years ago, there are delays in home leaving and establishing a household (Cherlin, Scabini, & Rossi, 1997; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). First marriage and transition to parenthood are also occurring at later ages (Fussell, 2002; Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). These familial markers, though, have symbolic significance. Empirical research suggests that men and women are more likely to perceive themselves as adults when

interacting with others if they have established a household and a long-term relationship (marriage or cohabitation) and begun parenting (Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer, & Erickson, 2005). Finishing school and beginning full-time work are not associated with feeling like an adult.

There is a considerable variability in the timing and sequencing of entry into adult roles such as entry into the work force, establishment of a household, marriage, and childrearing (Mouw, 2005). The variability signals a great deal of individual choice rather than a set progression through a series of role changes that was easier to identify in the earlier part of the twentieth century (Shanahan, 2000). The expansion of individual choice, while appearing to generate a sense of freedom, comes with risks because the outcomes are less predictable (Côté & Allahar, 2006). Additionally, individuals have fewer systematic or formal processes to guide decision making than previous generations (Furstenberg et al., 2005). With few information sources or supports for making decisions, individuals assume responsibility for consequences of their choices. The responsibility for outcomes of life choices may generate strains on individuals, particularly because they are faced with numerous decisions regarding educational pursuits, employment, life partners, health, and well-being (Schwartz, 2000, 2004). There is, however, no array of limitless choice for these pursuits. The constraints and affordances of the context, such as employment rates or familial ability to pay for post-secondary education, bound the process (Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). In addition, individuals' choices create their own constraints. For example, pursuing a career in the military, while providing longer-term employment, removes individuals from their intimate social networks for a period of time for training and work.

In summary, the transition to adulthood in late modern North America is not a linear progression from school to work to marriage and family formation. The economic and social context has helped contribute to a complex set of potential trajectories. Furthermore, individuals are faced with making an array of salient decisions as they move between educational institutions and workplaces, and negotiate relationships with family and peers. Few clear guidance strategies or institutions are available to help individuals navigate their way into adulthood.

Perspectives on the Transition to Adulthood

The following overview of the dominant approaches to the transition to adulthood points out the major contributions and limitations of these approaches. This summary helps to distinguish why we approach the transition to adulthood from a lifespan action theoretical perspective.

Life Events

Life events, such as becoming a parent or finishing school, help mark the changes in individuals' lives that signal the transition to adulthood. Tracking peoples'

achievement of life events is often used in sociology and demography to study the timing of the transition to adulthood. Researchers examine the achievement of social markers such as leaving home (Mitchell, 2004), starting a full-time job (Aquilino, 1996), starting a long-term union or marriage (Myers, 2000), and becoming a parent (Hogan & Astone, 1986; Shanahan, 2000). Moving beyond studying the achievement of certain life events, researchers using a life course approach (e.g., Mouw, 2005) examine how socially structured opportunities and limitations explain differences in the duration (e.g., length of schooling) and sequencing of events (e.g., leaving school, starting a full-time job, starting a long-term union) associated with the transition to adulthood. Historical comparisons (e.g., Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005) of the timing and sequencing of events that signal engagement in adult roles contribute to current understanding, across disciplines, of the increasing length of the transitional period in late modern societies.

Rites of Passage

Social markers, such as adult roles, signal the status of individuals to the larger community. One way of highlighting a social marker is to structure events that publicly recognize changes in individuals. These events are meaningful ways of acknowledging individuals' entry into the adult world (see Turner, 1967). Structured events highlighting public recognition of change are frequently termed *rites of passage* (see van Gennep, 1909/1960). In the case of the transition to adulthood, the events are frequently referred to as coming-of-age rituals.

Communities' cultural practices shape the passage from childhood to adulthood through rituals recognizing and celebrating changes such as puberty (e.g., Markstrom, 2008) or the completion of high school (Best, 2000). However, events associated with the transition to adulthood are difficult to detect in late modern societies because of individualization. Individualization is the term used to characterize societies that have few institutional constraints and supports propelling people through specific pathways over the life course (see Shanahan, 2000). Some practitioners concerned with the possibility that the absence of rituals gives way to youths' adoption of activities that signal adulthood, such as being in a gang or using illegal substances, have constructed rites of passage as interventions (Gavazzi & Blumenkrantz, 1993; Horrowitz, 1993; Warfield-Coppock, 1992). However, embedded in late modern societies characterized by individualization, these specialized coming-of-age rituals are subject to competing with larger forces.

Taking a slightly different approach to understanding rites of passage, Northcote (2006) points to the ways that youth may create their own informal rite of passage through leisure-time pursuits. Leisure activities, such as nightclubbing, allow for enactments of ritual behaviors associated with being adult. Engaging in these ritual behaviors supports exploration of an adult identity. This perspective views the individual as much more agentic than the traditional view of rites of passage that focuses on the actions of the community.

Psychosocial Maturity

In contrast to life events marking adulthood and recognition of adult status through rites of passage, there are approaches to the transition to adulthood that focus on internal processes of maturation. Psychosocial maturity includes autonomy (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006), commitments to future career goals or work (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002), capacity for intimacy (Scharf et al., 2004), and responsibility for others (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). From this view, development involves the transformation from a lack of maturity to full maturity albeit with individual differences in the process and outcome. Although the emphasis is on internal processes, the impetus for change or development is a combination of ontogeny and contextual influences.

The transition to full psychosocial maturity, or the transition to adulthood, emphasizes optimal achievement of developmental tasks. Achievement of maturity is both the goal and the signal of the transition to adulthood, particularly in the recent conceptualization proposed by Arnett (2000, 2004). Developmental progression toward adulthood involves the gradual passage from one period of the lifespan (emerging adulthood) to another (adulthood). Entry into adulthood occurs when maturity has been achieved and self-recognized.

Summary

Taken together, these various perspectives offer important information about the transition to adulthood. First, the transition to adulthood is clearly a process over a period of time. Even studies tracking events or markers associated with adulthood (e.g., marriage) understand that there are periods of preparation (e.g., in the case of marriage a period of courtship and planning) preceding these events. Rites of passage rituals symbolize the processes involved in transition. These rituals publicly move individuals through a period of preparation prior to the formal recognition as an adult and incorporation into the adult social spheres (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1909/1960). Psychosocial maturity is the slow transformation from immaturity to maturity. Each perspective portrays the transition to adulthood as encompassing gradual processes.

Second, the entry into adulthood is not clearly demarcated particularly in advanced industrial societies (Furstenberg et al., 2005; Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Knepler, 1974). Not everything in individuals' lives changes uniformly, nor is the process a linear transformation. For example, an individual's commitments to a career or type of work might precede the transition from school to work but the maturation of capacity for intimacy might extend well beyond entry into full-time work. The variation in change across domains of functioning is reflected in state governance over adult activities in advanced industrialized counties. State governance, or restrictions, over activities is designed to protect the well-being of young citizens. The protection ends with the lifting of restrictions – and marks an age of

"adulthood." Chronological ages for the lifting of restrictions vary across life spheres. There are differences in the ages at which individuals may cease their schooling, obtain an automobile drivers' license, enter armed forces, marry, or politically vote. These differences make the entry into adulthood ambiguous. There is no definite point at which an individuals' status changes (Wyn & White, 1997).

Looking across these various approaches to studying the transition to adulthood, the focus seems to be on the individual. However, a closer look reveals that the transition to adulthood is a social process. According to the rites of passage perspective, recognition from others, either informally or formally, helps to affirm individuals' completion of maturation or achievement of life tasks related to adulthood. Within the life events and psychosocial maturity perspectives, individuals enter new social realms, such as work or intimate relationships, leaving behind old social realms, such as school. Some social relations, such as family, retain their configuration. But the dynamics of the social relations are assumed to change due to the transformation from child, or immaturity, to adult, or maturity. Therefore, the process of moving from childhood to adulthood is not an individual enterprise. The transition to adulthood is a social process.

In summary, the various perspectives point to the transition to adulthood being an extended and nonlinear process with no clear indication of completion. The perspectives also suggest that the transition to adulthood is a social process. However, across these perspectives there are some aspects of the transition that tend to be overlooked. These are described in the next section.

Why a Different Approach?

Why a different approach to the transition to adulthood in this book? Current perspectives tend to overlook the agency of the individual and the social nature of the transition to adulthood. In this section, the use of an action theoretical perspective is explained.

None of the approaches to conceptualizing the transition to adulthood would deny the agency of individuals. Indeed, the notion of the "blank slate" is no longer an accepted conceptualization of socialization. However, individual agency is inadvertently overlooked across a number of theoretical perspectives on human development (Pinker, 2002). How is agency overlooked? Any emphasis on assessing outcomes (e.g., educational achievement, leaving home, maturity) as a function of social supports tends to overlook what individuals are contributing to their own development. Additionally, attempts to understand what forces, social or psychological, are influencing the transition to adulthood tend to pass over individuals' contributions to their own development. There are exceptions, such as Northcote's (2006) work on youths' construction of informal rites of passage. But such exceptions do not fill in the gaps in our knowledge about individuals' contributions to their transition to adulthood.

To understand individual agency during the transition to adulthood, it is useful to turn to action theories of human development. Action theories allow for

an understanding of the ways that individuals act on their own development (see Brandtstädter, 2006; Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999). In this book, the action theory used (von Cranach, Kalbermatten, Indermühle, & Gugler, 1982) enables us to understand the actions of individuals and the meanings they give to those actions. This process is explained in greater detail in the next chapter of this book.

In addition to overlooking agency, current perspectives tend to overlook the social nature of the transition to adulthood. Current perspectives on the transition to adulthood recognize the importance of social relationships. Social supports are critical for helping individuals make the transition, particularly during rites of passage. Additionally, the transition to adulthood involves changes in social relationships. The transition to adulthood, as noted earlier, is a social process. But, other than rites of passage, there is a tendency for the other perspectives to treat the actions of other social actors as background information (e.g., parental financial support for educational achievement). Further, individuals' interactions with other social actors are not attended to when addressing life events marking adulthood or psychosocial maturity. To address this gap, this book attends to the very social nature of the transition to adulthood by using an action theoretical perspective that addresses joint actions and meaning making. The use of the word joint means the individual is acting together with another person or group of people in the co-construction of the transition to adulthood.

The complex nature of the transition to adulthood is often simplified because theoretical and research foci often limit our perspective to a limited number of outcomes or influences. But youth's lives are much more complex than efforts to make a decision about a romantic relationship or move out of the familial home. By using the action theory approach we are able to observe the complex lives of youth. Take for example, a young woman named Emily who lives with her parents and two siblings. Emily is in her first year of community college but contemplating whether or not to put her studies on hold for a year or so. She has the sense that her college education is not leading her anywhere although she feels that education will be important for her longer-term future goal of owning a business. While going to college, Emily is working part-time, taking dance lessons, and going clubbing with friends in the evenings. Her dance lessons, paid by her parents, are not leading to a dance teaching career as Emily had hoped. She has spent years training but now feels that her goal of teaching may not be possible. Her part-time employment involves being alone at work late in the evenings which her parents think may be unsafe. But Emily wants to keep this job because the work schedule allows her to continue dance lessons and spend time with friends at clubs. This young woman is acting on her goals for work, education, family, peers, career, and safety. These goals and actions are not independent from one another. They are interconnected and linked to other people. For example, work and physical safety are important concerns for her parents from whom Emily receives emotional and financial support. But Emily and her parents also want to promote her growing autonomy. Her parents want her to work and attend school but she is not sure about where her education is headed. Nor is she sure that she wants to work while attending school because she also wants to maintain her dance lessons and time with peers.

By observing Emily's actions and goals for her actions, we can see who is involved and the salience of relationships during the transition to adulthood. We also observe how the past and future are impacting Emily's current decision making about her dance teaching career goals. Our observations also reveal the complexity of Emily's goal-setting and the ways in which her actions are productive and counterproductive. Emily's transition to adulthood is not a linear progression of decision making leading to change. She is not working with a list of pros and cons. She is talking to family and peers about whether to continue dance lessons and college or switch to bartending school. Additionally, Emily is responding to her own emotions and cognitions such as the realization that she dislikes geography and loves dancing. Reflecting the everyday life of a young woman growing up in North America, Emily's situation is not unusual. What is unusual is our approach to the transition to adulthood. Rather than focusing on decision making for the future, we observe the actions and the meanings for actions of youths and their social networks. We attend to the ways that aspects of daily life are interwoven with each another. We try to understand how the past, present, and future play key roles in the transition process. Our action theoretical approach moves us away from a narrow emphasis on a few aspects of the transition to adulthood to an in-depth look which facilitates effective counseling.

Finally, calls to attend to the effects of modernity and economic structuring on the transition to adulthood (e.g., Côté & Allahar, 1994) highlight problems associated with labor markets, social engagement, and socio-emotional well-being. Suggestions for ameliorating the negative effects of modernity and economic restructuring on the transition to adulthood focus on institutional and social change (Côté & Allahar, 2006; Pittman, Diversi, & Ferber, 2002; Settersten, 2005; Tyyskä, 2001). We agree with many of these suggestions, such as strengthening education-to-work linkages, but also acknowledge the importance of supporting individuals and the significant other people in their social networks. Such support can be provided through counseling. The action theoretical perspective presented in this book is well suited for counseling during the transition to adulthood.

Chapter 2
Transition to Adulthood as Goal-Directed Action

One of the many poignant scenes in Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, is the conversation between Happy and his mother, Linda. Linda is trying to convince her son that he has to commit to something in life; that he can not just sit around and not do anything. This conversation represents a segment of a transition to adulthood process – the mother–son conversation in which they are discussing his future. Similarly, the research literature on the transition to adulthood reviewed in Chapter 1 has pointed to transition as a process. It also showed that this process takes place over a longer period of time than once was the case, often a decade or more, well after 18 years of age. Third, what constitutes a successful transition to adulthood is less clear than it once was. Marriage, full-time employment, and leaving the family home are not the decisive markers of adulthood that they were even 50 years ago, the kind of markers that Linda Loman sought for her son. Research evidence also shows that parents and their children in the 18–34 years age range in North America spend a great deal of time together – on average, 367 hours per year (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). In addition, there are a number of tasks that seem central to youth who are in this transition process, including developing and acting on romantic relationships, pursuing higher and further education, making plans for and testing out various employment options, determining how to be healthy and fit, and feeling comfortable with themselves and others. When the range of possible outcomes is broadened and the time span for their realization extended, then the focus on the processes becomes more salient.

All these characteristics of the transition to adulthood reflect how it can be understood as goal-directed action, that is, in one form or another, these aspects of the transition to adulthood represent intentional goals undertaken by youth individually and jointly with significant others in their lives. Our purpose in this chapter is to present action theory as a heuristic framework for understanding the transition to adulthood, and counseling and other interventions that can assist young people engaged in this process.

The evidence provided in Chapter 1 indicated that there are innumerable social conditions that either facilitate or prevent youth from adequate transition to adulthood (e.g., Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005a). To some extent these factors can be considered as resources available to a greater or lesser degree to youth during the transition process. But a number of these conditions can be

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understood from the perspective of the actions of youth and those who act jointly with them. These conditions are encapsulated in youth's goals, cognitions, emotions, and behavior. For example, addiction to illegal substances can be considered as an impediment to the successful transition to adulthood, but as we have shown elsewhere, addiction can also be considered as goal-directed action (Graham, Young, Valach, & Wood, 2008).

We begin this chapter with an overview of action theory as an explanation of the transition to adulthood. This paradigm is then illustrated by applying it to the issue of what constitutes a successful transition, under the assumption that naturally occurring processes, such as many parent–youth joint projects during this period, as well as formal interventions such as counseling, ultimately directed at facilitating transitions.

The Action-Theoretical Paradigm for Understanding Transitions to Adulthood

Consider a hypothetical young woman making the transition to adulthood. She is engaged in a number of projects. Several of these projects are likely subsumed by relationships, for example, she is likely involved with her parents in reconstructing their relationship to foster greater self-governance as well as addressing issues of separation. She is engaging in friendship projects by both participating in shared activities with peers and drawing them into her projects and interests. She is apt to be testing out and developing romantic relationships. Other probable projects include engagement in educational and occupational pursuits that point to possible futures for the person. These projects are based on and involve the continued construction of an identity. All of them are grounded in the skills that she has developed and honed up to this point. These skills are in a wide range of areas and enable her to implement short-term and mid-term goals, as well as consider long-term ones. Her projects rely on the internal and external resources that are available to her. In engaging in these projects she is aware of and able to reflect on her own thoughts and feelings. Moreover, she is able to use these internal processes to motivate herself to engage in her projects. She is able to see the connection between current and past actions as well as their projection into the future. At the same time, the communication between her and those engaged in the projects with her contributes to accomplishing these projects.

While this encapsulation of the hypothetical youth in transition may sound ideal, these processes are needed by youth and should be supported by people, institutions, and agencies with whom youth are in contact. Contextual action theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding these processes, whether they turn in favor of the youth's transition to adulthood or against it.

Action theory is based on the notion that the common experience of people is that their own and other people's behaviors are understood as goal-directed actions (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996, 2002). Thus, transition to adulthood can be understood as goal-directed action. This framework for how people understand and make sense of human behavior looks to the goals of action and other action processes

rather than the causes of behavior for understanding. Once considered across time, action theory suggests a significant link between actions, projects, and career, which is particularly relevant because transition to adulthood looks across time to the future. *Action* refers to the intentional goal-directed behavior of persons, for example, the mother–son conversation referred to at the beginning of this chapter can be considered an action, as can writing this chapter, or going to a film. When several discrete actions that occur over a mid-length period of time are constructed as having common goals we consider them as a *project*, for example, the mother–son conversation in *Death of a Salesman* may have been one of a series of conversations that they had regarding Happy Loman's future, of helping him "take hold of some kind of life." Finally, when projects coalesce over a long period of time and have a significant place in one's life, then we can speak of *career*. Here, of course, we do not restrict career to its occupational meaning, but use it to refer to the construct that allows people to make connections among actions and projects over longer periods and significant domains of their lives (see Young et al., 2002). In the case of Linda in *Death of a Salesman*, this project could have been seen by her and others in her family as a parenting career, involving a number of projects over a number of years.

In this action theoretical view, transition to adulthood can be understood as a project, that is, a series of goal-directed behaviors directed toward one or more aspects of becoming adult. It is also suggested that, when optimally engaged in, it looks to the long-term meaning making that is career (again, not simply in the narrow occupational sense). This long-term construction of *career* depends upon engaging in projects of a mid-term length, and projects are only possible when we can see that relevant *actions* are associated through common and hierarchically linked goals.

In the process of engaging in transition-related actions and projects, the youth cognitively steers and regulates them. As youths act, they steer that action based on their thoughts and feelings. For example, a young person can react with a high degree of anxiety at the prospect of applying for a job or be indecisive when asked to choose higher education options (e.g., Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006). The communication between people that invariably happens in joint actions and projects also contributes to the regulation and steering of action. For example, parental involvement and support for autonomy were found to be important protective factors for adjustment to college (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay, 2007). We can interpret these findings to suggest that communication with parents contributes to the adjustment-to-college project. Finally, the hypothetical youth identified earlier engages in specific behavior, based on her skills and habits. These behaviors have both conscious and unconscious sources. As well, youths draw on internal and external resources to be able to engage in actions and projects.

The action theoretical paradigm proposed here has a significant social dimension, which again points to its relevance for understanding transition to adulthood, as the social features of the latter are clear. By conceptually linking action, project and career, we have already moved beyond the idea of the individual – whether considered from the perspective of personality traits or individual decisional processes – to ideas of joint action and the embedding of actions in socially constructed projects and careers. The intentionality we spoke of earlier reflects, at one level, the

individual intentions of actors that they bring to and are generated within actions. We also agree with Shotter (1993) that joint action captures an intentionality that is not fully accounted for by the individual intentions of the participants.

Contextual action theory leads us to propose an understanding of transition that is different from most uses of this term. In contrast to transition as a period during which a number of specific tasks are accomplished (e.g., Osgood et al., 2005a), or a time when one sets oneself on a life trajectory (Lloyd, Behrman, Stromquist, & Cohen, 2005), transition in action theory is conceptualized as goal-directed action. In other words, transition is represented or captured in the goal-directed actions, project and career of people. From our perspective, transition involves goal-directed actions, but it is most readily understood as a project (or several projects) that the young person engages in. Rather than predetermining these projects as tasks to be accomplished, our view is to approach these projects as the person sees them as meaningful to him or her and as they are jointly constructed as meaningful to those engaged in them together. An example may be helpful at this stage. A mother may be helping her daughter, a high school senior, to apply to university for the following year. This action is seen by both of them as a necessary step if the young woman is to be able to attend university in the subsequent year. Furthermore, university may be thought of as part of a longer-term project of getting the education she wants, or is expected to have, or providing her with the opportunities to lead the kind of life she only dimly anticipates at this time. From our perspective, this action can be easily understood as involving the transition to adulthood. To the mother and daughter at the time, the critical question is what this action is about for them. Of course, many answers are not only possible but likely. Some of these answers will be common to both mother and daughter, for example, getting along with each other, getting the application done, being motivated, showing their love for each other. Other answers may be more particular to each individual; for the daughter, answers may include counting on my mother's experience in these matters, acquiescing to her mother's wish for her to go to university, feeling scared to do it by herself. For the mother, motivating her daughter to actually apply rather than just talk about it, fulfilling her role as a mother, solidifying their relationship through concrete tasks. Further, each of these possible answers could be ordered in a hierarchy, with one being more important than another, and lower ones contributing to higher ones. When asked, or if it is brought to their attention, this mother and daughter would likely agree that this action is about the transition to adulthood. What they have done, however, is to engage in a goal-directed action, and probably several actions together, that are directed toward a goal or goals that they have commonly and jointly constructed. While in the particular and specific, this has to do with applying to university, in a larger and longer time perspective, this action contributes to the transition to adulthood.

What distinguishes this understanding of transition from a task understanding is the focus on intentionality of the person and persons involved. If we are to make any difference in transition to adulthood, it is necessary, in the first instance, to appreciate how the persons involved in specific actions understand these actions, that is, what they see them as being about. Determining what an action is "about" is

based on naïve, consensual, as well as scientific observations, which are described throughout this book. We have used the words *intention* and *intentionality* several times already, and you can expect them to be used frequently in the chapters that follow. Without delving too deeply into the philosophical roots, we note that intentions and intentionality have to do with mental states associated with actions. Two specific examples are illustrative for our purposes. First, many young people have future-oriented intentions, for example, "I intend to go to university," or "I am planning to get married by the time I am 30 years old." These are intentions and plans for the future. While they may explain some of the person's current actions, there is a great deal of variability in the extent to which they do. This variability may range from a vague hope to a realistic plan.

Another example of intentionality is that associated with current actions. A young person may be in the process of moving out of the family home. The intentionality associated with this action may have to do with "getting my own place," "being responsible for myself," "having less parental supervision," or many other possible intentions or combinations of intentions. Our view is that the intentionality of current action has not received the attention it deserves in understanding and explaining transition to adulthood. Heretofore, transition to adulthood has often referred to a future state rather than an ongoing process, attention has been focused on the actions and intentions of that future state, for example, being married, or being a geneticist. The classic example of the fixation of Western and other cultures with adulthood as a steady state is reflected in the question often asked of children and adolescents, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Whatever future intentions are represented in the answer to that question, they cannot be realized without considering present actions which contain their own intentionality beyond the occupation that may identified in the response. Moreover, it is necessary to recognize that the long-term plan is not primarily a matter of working backwards from whatever the long-term intention may be, although for some persons the long-term plan is influential. Rather we consider it critical to focus on present action and the intentionality which informs it. The farther distant in time a future intention may be, the more likely it is that current actions/intentions will interfere with its realization.

We also know from philosophy that any action may represent more than one intention. We previously spoke about goals being hierarchically related. For example, in some of the research that is reported in this book, we found that the parent–youth relationship projects as well as identity projects were judged as more important than some other projects which they subsumed, such as the governance transfer projects and parenting projects.

Successful Transition to Adulthood

How can we talk about successful transition to adulthood in general terms? We know that adulthood was considered differently in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s than it is currently. Young adults who are successful now might have been looked upon as

not wanting to grow up if they had lived in the 1950s. Consider a young woman living in the first decade of the twenty-first century. She may not be married, is not pursuing a conventional career but engages in a series of projects. She dresses as an adolescent and tries to keep her appearance as youthful as possible. She behaves in a silly, adolescent way, and does not adhere to the values expected of a serious and respectful member of this society. She might be a member of a rock band and earn more than an accountant of the same age. She might continue to buy records and go to concerts just like she did when she was an adolescent. Thus, it seems to be that a person can be a successful adult at present with the manners, behavior, and appearance that used to be reserved for adolescents. In addition, we know that a successful adult in one cultural circle or social strata might not be considered successful in another. Subordination to parents might be viewed as demonstrating a lack of maturity in one cultural or social group and as a moral maxim for adults in another. Financial dependence on parents might be seen in one socio-economic level as a sign of immaturity and as irrelevant in judging successful adulthood in another. Thus, the conventions of cultural and social background cannot be considered universal, but they are nonetheless very important in process of transitioning to adulthood. Culture figures prominently in action theory. The challenge of developing a dynamic and sensitive understanding of culture in the transition to adulthood is addressed in Chapter 3.

The action theory paradigm allows the transition to adulthood to be understood and described in a way that is closer to human experience and which has greater ecological validity than many other explanations. However, it does not propose what is necessary for successful transitions. Rather, it has the potential to describe what the case is, that is, what is actually happening in the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, it focuses on how these processes are conceptualized and organized. Chung, Little, and Steinberg (2005) described what it takes to become a successful adult as a series of development tasks that lead to psychosocial maturity. We prefer to think of it as a series of actions and projects that are constructed by those involved in them as much as they are expected chronologically or culturally. There is substantial overlap in what Chung and colleagues identified with our view, but identifying these tasks as joint actions and projects allows us to think of them as processes and to look specifically at the levels of meaning, functional steps, and behavior, as well as resources, that are needed for their realization.

Earlier in this chapter, we were able to portray a hypothetical person in the process of transition. This portrayal can be expanded so that we can posit characteristics of both the systems of action, that is, action, project, and career, and the levels in which action is organized, that is, goals, steps, and elements. It is our view that these systems and levels of action encapsulate successful transition processes, at least hypothetically. As we have tried to make the case above, the goals of transition cannot be predetermined and proposed to represent populations, except in the most general sense. Goals have to arise in and through the actions of those engaged in them. However, using the action theory paradigm, we can posit aspects of the processes which are ideally engaged in at each level of the transition to adulthood

process. The question that we address here is, What are the steps or processes that will comprise a successful transition to adulthood?

The first characteristic of this paradigm is the dynamic relationship between action, project, and career. Rather than considering either the tasks or the outcome of transition, the action theory paradigm allows us to establish the connection between goals at various levels.

The second characteristic is that transition to adulthood is not a single event, but a series of actions over several years, actions that are seen as meaningful for transition. Transition to adulthood aims toward the life-enhancing career, but does not encapsulate it. Thus, the processes that are specifically involved in the transition to adulthood can be specified at the action and projects levels. Examples of these processes are given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Domains and issues of the life-enhancing career. In Young and Valach (2008), used with permission

	Meaningful goal-directed actions	Motivated participation in projects generated by actor and/or others	Life-enhancing career
At the level of meaning	☐ Shared action goals ☐ Relevant to projects and career	☐ Joint, goal-directed projects ☐ Cooperative ☐ Emotionally sensitive ☐ Relevant to career and identity	☐ Long-term meaning of life ☐ Socially integrated ☐ Emotionally satisfying
At the level of steering processes	☐ Serving identity and goal processes ☐ Emotional and cognitive components	☐ Mid-term challenging ☐ Successful steps ☐ Positive feedback in cooperative undertakings ☐ Emotionally functional	☐ Long-term challenging ☐ Allowing predictability and novelty ☐ Attendance to emotional issues
At the level of unconscious and conscious behaviour, structural support, resources	☐ Energy ☐ Cognitive and emotional regulation ☐ Skills ☐ Habits	☐ Adequate structural support ☐ Predictable and manageable time order ☐ Adequate emotional resources	☐ Long-term adequate time and sequence ☐ Structural properties ☐ Resources ☐ Functional emotional regulation

Actions a young person engages in for a successful transition to adulthood are ones in which there are shared goals with others, as well as goals that are relevant to longer-term projects. These actions involve identity and goal processes, include emotional and cognitive components, include energy, and are based on skills and habits, as well as being cognitive and emotionally regulated. In turn these actions, when taken together, contribute to and are constructed as joint projects that are generated with others and are motivated. Here meaning is achieved through their

cooperative nature, their emotional sensitivity, and their relevance to the young person's identity and career. In the process of engaging in these projects, the young person finds them challenging, but not so challenging as to not be successful at most of these steps involved in them. The young person receives positive feedback and engages in them in an emotionally functional way. In order to engage in these projects, the young person needs adequate structural support, predictable and manageable time, as well as adequate emotional resources.

The Processes of Successful Transitioning to Adulthood

We are now able to pose the questions, "What constitutes a successful transition to adulthood from an action theory perspective?" and, "Does the action theory paradigm allow us to propose what constitutes a successful transition?" Answers to these questions describe what youth involved in transition can direct their efforts toward and how counselors can help them.

Process Issues

It is difficult to conclusively describe a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood by its outcome. Thus, it becomes all the more important to consider process issues. As we discuss in other chapters of this book, the conscious understanding of these processes by all participants as joint goal-directed processes in which the participants are the actors or agents is crucial. The adolescence-to-adulthood transition can be seen as a joint project composed of a series of important subprojects. Thus, it is important to ensure youth are engaged in and attend to all the relevant projects in their lives, including the autonomy project, the vocational project, projects leading toward financial independence, the relationship project, the romantic project, the educational project, and many other projects that are a priority at this time of life, socially or individually.

Coordination and Compatibility

The coordination and compatibility of these projects must be assessed. It is cumbersome to ask for advancement in autonomy and responsibility projects of adolescents, on the one hand, and to regularly insist, as a parent for example, on being informed on all details of their life, on the other. The best career propositions made by parents will be useless unless adolescents are able to accept them and make them their own. If the push from outside is stronger than the drive from inside, steered by high autonomy goals, outside well-intended help will not facilitate the relevant actions but may be detrimental to the transition to adulthood.

Communication

Relationship projects, described in Chapter 5, and the concomitant communication required for their success must function well. The question that can be asked is, "Is the family successfully managing family changes according to the many new challenges of transition?" One important component of successful joint family projects is effective communication that is responsive to the needs of all involved. For example, successful transition requires communication in which the recipients are informed but not questioned so as to be challenged; where emotions are communicated; where individual expectations are discussed; where individual feelings and not the mistakes made by the partners in the joint action are recognized; where communication is used to facilitate the identity goals; where positive references and, in particular, negative references are specific rather than general; and where one refers to consequences of actions and not to the value of the person performing this action. Thus, the quality of the transition can also be assessed based on the quality of communication within family projects.

Steering Processes

Another dimension to assess the quality of transition is the quality of steering processes within the various projects. Steering implies setting up goals in individual and joint actions and projects. Family and individual projects require steering. Family and other groups participating in transition projects should develop a heterarchical structure allowing different participants to be active in steering projects. Acquiring such a structure is an important quality for successful transition. Steering should be processed in such a way that it does not obstruct any other projects or actions. It should be related to clearly defined goals, and not subverted by adjoined goals. To learn to steer individual and joint actions and projects takes some time and cannot be accomplished by simple instruction. Learning and practicing mindfulness can facilitate the steering of actions and project. Acquiring projects, setting up goals, being able to formulate wishes and visions in terms of a hierarchy and sequence of goals are important steps on the way to effective transition. It is important that the youth learns that living his/her life means having goals, even though having goals is sometimes connected to pressure exercised by parents or teachers.

Control and Regulation Processes

Individual and joint actions and projects related to the transition to adulthood require adequate control processes. These are designed to choose, maintain, and revise the procedures, steps, strategies, and plans in the service of the implemented goals. Thus, effective transition and transition-related projects and actions must possess well-functioning control processes that enable the actors or agents to operate at low

emotional, relational, and other costs. Learning to engage in control processes of one's own or joint actions and projects in a facilitative rather than a punishing or distractive way is an important process in achieving effective transition. This type of engagement in control processes requires a certain degree of reflexivity and an ability to obtain information and to evaluate this information adequately. Another important process to address in assessing effective transformation is the process of regulation. These processes are often semi-conscious or unconscious in individual actions and projects and frequently are not talked about or are handled in nonverbal ways in joint actions and projects. However, it is necessary to assure that these processes work. For example, many actors or agents assume that others should know when they are disappointed, but, in fact, this is not always the case. Thus, establishing effective regulation requires extensive communicating and informing those engaged in joint actions. It also is necessary to find ways to ensure that differing values and other conflicts do not affect actions and projects in a detrimental way. Conflicts can be addressed by making them conscious and communicating about them in order to solve them. Unregulated actions are well known as impulsive actions or responses. While disagreeable on an individual level, they are even more difficult in joint actions or projects, as the actors move toward ineffective, nonfunctional, and often irrational decisions. An important part of all these processes is also a well-functioning knowledge management. It should be possible to implement new knowledge in individual and joint action and project processes. We know how difficult it is to learn and absorb new knowledge, and to apply it to individuals, groups, and organizations in joint processes. Often it is even difficult to engage people in learning processes. As we often cannot let go of habits and ineffective strategies, it frequently is difficult to accept and process new knowledge in joint actions and projects. New knowledge feels threatening; the power structure in a joint project might be challenged. However, it is important that a knowledge management system is developed to enable to youth in transition to adulthood to continuously engage in learning.

Monitoring Processes

Effective transition also requires well-functioning monitoring processes, that is, cognitive and emotional monitoring in individual actions and projects, and communication and positive group feeling in joint actions and projects. To be able to reflect about one's own action, to access consciously the complex network in actions, to free emotional monitoring from old traumas and anxieties about the future are important achievements in individual action. To be able to communicate in a group about ongoing processes, to free the group's feelings from future worries and past disagreements, as might occur in a family, facilitates the transition processes. Being able to address and improve these issues is an important competence in the efficient transition process.

Energizing Processes

Effective transition also requires energizing processes that are well attended to and focused, and that move transition projects forward in enduring ways. Energizing is often achieved by emotional–motivational processes in individual actions and projects and in gratifying–supporting ways in family or joint projects. Developing self-generated motivation and energizing are significant assets in the transition to adulthood. Not having to constantly refer to obligations, punishment, negative thoughts, and similar repressive measures facilitates the effective adolescent-to-adulthood transition.

Summarizing the suggestions for a successful transition, the following points can be stressed. All those engaged in the transition to adulthood, that is, youth, parents, family members, friends, teachers, employers, and others, should consciously understand that processes relevant to the transition to adulthood are joint and goal-directed. In the complex network of these processes, all relevant projects should be identified, attended to, and maintained. They should be run in a well-coordinated and compatible way. A successful relationship project, effective communication, steering, control and regulating as well as knowledge management, monitoring, and energizing at individual and group level are important preconditions of successful transition.

Chapter 3
Action and the Practice of Counseling for Transitions

A significant counseling literature addresses youth who are in the process of making the transition to adulthood (e.g., Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000; Drier & Ciccone, 1988; Guichard & Dumora, 2008). In some of this literature, transition to adulthood is explicitly identified as the focus (e.g., Savickas, 1999; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997); other parts deal with aspects of transition, such as career development, without calling it transition (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2008; Hansen, 1999). Essentially, this literature indicates that a range of theoretical approaches and interventions can be effective in assisting young people during the years of late adolescence and early adulthood. In this chapter, we describe the links between contextual action theory and the practice of counseling for the transition to adulthood and beyond. Contextual action theory is not a distinctive and separate therapeutic school, although, as is evident in this and subsequent chapters, it emphasizes some types of understanding client problems and intervening in them over others. Rather, contextual action theory offers the basis for understanding therapeutic and counseling processes as goal-directed action, which importantly parallels the processes in which young clients, and clients generally, are engaged. Both counseling and transition are goal-directed processes. The questions we address in this chapter are, How can contextual action theory serve in improving the practical work of counseling? How can this perspective facilitate understanding the counseling processes?

Consider a young client who presents herself for counseling. She is concerned about her choice of occupation, how to balance her work with attending university, as well as her past and present relationships with her family. The latter emerges as the topic that receives the most attention in several counseling sessions with this client. The counselor is able to join the client in exploring the client's relationships with her family, including facilitating the client talking about her feelings about her family and constructing a narrative of her family and her place in it. By emphasizing the client's strengths and with some suggestions about behavioral changes and actions outside of the counseling sessions, the counselor is able to help this client become more aware of the difficult feelings she had toward some members of her family, to begin to resolve them, and to have more successful interactions with family members.

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Transition to adulthood was not addressed explicitly in this counseling process, although it can be easily recognized that the issues the client brought to the counselor pertain to the processes in which she is engaged as a young person. Primarily, in this case, the young person is addressing how to successfully renegotiate her relationships with her family. This process is normative for adolescents as they gain more independence from parents and parents grant them more autonomy. But in this case, the client is challenged more directly because she reported a history of conflicted relationships with some members of her family. While the focus of counseling with this client remains on addressing her relationships with her family, it is likely that they are related to the initial presenting problem of occupational choice and balancing the demands of work and education.

The brief case summary points to two significant and related considerations about counseling: goal-directedness and formal and informal theories. In this case the client and the counselor saw their work as goal-directed, that is, as directed toward empowering the client in her relationships with family members, and as the counseling progressed from session to session to improving those relationships in specific ways. For example, consider the following segment of their dialogue as reflective of their joint goals in counseling:

Counselor: Okay, so you feel that your mom's feelings are your problems.
Client: Yeah, I guess so.
Counselor: Is that a realistic expectation of yourself?
Client: No, of course not.
Counselor: Does it have to be like this?

To reach their goals, the counselor and client also recognized and enacted within-session goals such as exploring and deepening the client's self-awareness and identifying her strengths. As well, although not explicitly mentioned in the case summary, the counselor likely understood the goal-directedness of the counseling process and the client's life processes by implicitly using both her informal and formal theories. The counselor's informal theories, guided by her own life experiences and experience as a counselor, see the client's actions as being directed toward certain goals. Her formal theories suggest that the client's situation and her behavior are caused by certain circumstances or dispositions, such as her personality or abilities. The counselor informed by contextual action theory would want to formulate the client's problem more explicitly using informal theories, whereas for other counselors these informal understandings of the issues this client is presenting might be more tacit or implicit. The way in which counselors can understand the counseling process as well as processes in clients' lives is described in this chapter.

Contextual action theory works intensively at the interface of informal and formal theories (Valach, Young, & Lynam, 2002). The point of departure is the consideration of the model or the image of a person that emerges in the counselor's answers to questions such as,

> What are my personal beliefs about human nature? Are people essentially energetic and self-motivated or by nature lazy and in need of external motivation? What are the forces that cause people to grow and change? What retards that process? . . . How do I establish relationship with my clients? . . . How do I motivate unmotivated clients? (Isaacson & Brown, 2000, p. 384)

Contextual action theory stresses the relevance of a model of the client as a responsible human being, comparable to the model we have of professionals themselves. The notion of the goal-directedness of human beings answers the question whether people are lazy or self-motivated. People see the behavior of other people as well as their own, with only a few exceptions, as goal-directed actions (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). In contrast, in some areas of psychology, students learn to consider human behavior as natural phenomena following causal laws. Like much of the discipline of psychology itself, students want to identify and describe the forces that cause people to grow and change. The apparent conflict between these descriptive frames, that is, goal-directed processes versus causal laws, is an unfortunate one which we see as being responsible for many of the discrepancies between theory and research, on the one hand, and counseling practice on the other.

Most counselors learn from practice that they have to act with their clients within a framework of goal-directed processes rather than causal relationships. This is in contrast to counselors' formal learning that stresses statements of causal relationships in addressing client behavior. In particular, theories addressing clients' behavior are often statements of causal relationships, following the principles as developed in the classical mechanics of the eighteenth century (Strong, 1973). This could also be said about social cognitive career theory although it, ironically enough, includes concepts of goals and self-efficacy (Lent, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that Betz (2008) stated that although "[s]ocial cognitive career theory has received considerable interest from vocational researchers . . . much more remains to be done in designing and evaluating interventions based on the theory" (p. 365).

Thus, two different sets of assumptions about the image of the person emerge from causal versus goal-directed perspectives. Counselors of youth in transition are seen as goal-directed human beings following goals in their counseling. Clients' behaviors, however, are often seen in counseling theories as being a result of causal forces. Some authors sensed this discrepancy and declared that the goal of counseling is to help the clients to become agents (Cochran & Laub, 1994), an acting power (Chen, 1997), and goal-directed human beings (Rule & Bishop, 2006; Sweeney, 1998). In our writing, we maintain that clients in transition to adulthood are always goal-directed human beings, although they sometimes participate in projects and careers with others in which they might not be fully aware of the goals of these projects and careers. In addition, some clients might follow, for a variety of reasons, self-destructive careers, projects, and actions as we were able to illustrate in the case of suicide (Michel & Valach, 2001; Valach, Michel, Dey, & Young, 2002; Valach, Michel, Young, & Dey, 2006a) and drug abuse (Graham et al., 2008), in which many young people in the process of transition to adulthood are involved, among others.

Counseling for Transition from the Action-Theory Perspective

In understanding human action as a goal-directed process, we are at the core of issues surrounding counseling and transition processes. We propose the following guidelines to inform a goal-directed view of counseling. These guidelines may help counselors adopt and use this view in their practice. Much additional information on counseling processes utilizing an action-theory approach and its application to issues surrounding the transition to adulthood can be found in subsequent chapters of this book and in other publications.

Understanding Counseling as a Goal-Directed Process

Counselors of youth in transition can see the processes they encounter as systems of joint goal-directed action (short-term), project (mid-term), and career (long-term) (Young, Valach, et al., 2001). These key conceptualizations of human behavior capture the processes counselors work with and that reflect clients' lives, the counseling encounter, as well as the broader system in which counselors are embedded professionally. For example, in the illustrative case, understanding that the client is engaged in a family relationship project (Young et al., 1997), and the link between this project and her transition to adulthood, is critical to intervening successfully with her. The client's relationship project is goal-directed and embedded in a number of other projects and actions in her life. Further, counseling itself is a goal-directed process in which goals are established and ways to achieve them defined based on counselors' professional knowledge and clients' involvement and preferences. Additionally, counseling sessions are part of the counselors' professional career. Counselors utilize their knowledge and experience from previous training and counseling, document counseling according to professional standards, address issues in supervision, and so forth. Counseling might occur within an institution or counseling service. Thus, some organizational processes are also at stake in counseling, such as the goals of a learning organization or quality assurance.

Further, counselors informed by contextual action theory understand that the goal-directed processes are characterized by three different hierarchically ordered levels or subsystems, namely, steering, control, and regulation processes (also see Table 3.1).

These processes are ongoing in actions, projects, and career at the same time. The highest level of the goal-directed process system organization reflects steering processes is defined in socially meaningful terms, and identifies the unit of analysis, be it action, project, or career through an assumption of a goal. For example, based on previous counseling sessions and a shared understanding with the client, a counselor may want a client to experience his anxiety about the future more fully. This goal serves the counselor to steer or guide what happens in the session. The counselor has to establish this goal as a joint goal shared with the client, to assure that the client will engage in this process, and will initiate the relevant steps

Table 3.1 Goal-directed processes

Processes	Description	Counselor example
Steering	Defined in the socially meaningful terms and identified as goals	To increase the client's experience of her feeling toward family members
Controlling	Steps needed and executed to reach the goal	Invites attention to feeling Focuses on affect associated with target situation Evokes the situation
Regulating	Elements used to enact the steps, conscious and unconscious behavior, skills, habits, words. Phrases, resources	Identifies and reflects client affect in words, voice quality and nonverbal behavior; prolongs attention to the affect; repeats affect words Listens closely Regulates nonverbal behavior, closeness, eye contact

toward this goal. The medium level is seen as control processes. These are defined in functional terms and identify the steps of action, project, or career. The functional steps the counselor mentioned above may use to achieve the intended goal is to provide strong empathetic listening and in asking the client about his feelings and about details associated with his feelings. In this way, the counselor enables the client to stay with the target situation and the feelings that arise in it. Finally, the lowest level process, regulation, is described in physical terms and identifies elements of action, project, and career. Our counselor has to have particular skills to be able to accurately identify and reflect the client's affect. He knows that certain words have to be said, that certain qualities of voice and speed of speech facilitate the experience of affect and that this process must be prolonged. The counselor also recognizes that the clients' changing the topic or engaging in other self-protective measures to neutralize the feelings should be avoided.

Counselors recognize that the client–counselor encounter is a goal-directed, joint process. As well, they recognize that the relationships clients have with others are also joint processes. In the illustrative case, the relationship issues the client presented are clearly joint processes, that is, they are processes that occur between the client and her family members. But the client has individual goals and processes that occur as part of, and while, the joint processes are ongoing. Counselors work with the duality of individual and joint processes occurring simultaneously. Realizing that other participants have important roles in the client's life, even if they are not physically present in the counseling session, helps in understanding the processes the client is involved in.

Empirical Methods to Support Understanding Counseling as a Goal-Directed Process

These propositions about goal-directed processes in action, project, and career are based on empirical methods available to both counselors and researchers (Young,

Valach, & Domene, 2005). These empirical methods are naïve observation, the self-confrontation interview, and systemic observation. Naïve observation provides information on social meaning, the self-confrontation interview addresses subjective processes, and systematic observation explicates the manifest order of action, project, and career while utilizing the social and the subjective view as well. Each of these methods is described in subsequent chapters. Through their use counselors can understand the possibility of approaching the counseling processes and the life processes of the client systematically and empirically.

The Self-Confrontation Interview

The balance between the actions of the counseling encounter and exploration of the action outside of counseling that the client is discussing is often not easy to maintain. For example, it is functional for the ongoing action of the counselor–client encounter for the counselor to respond immediately to the client's negative emotion when it occurs. This allows for relationship building and strengthening the client's belief in counselor and client efficacy (Michel, Dey, Stadler, & Valach, 2004). Asking about action accompanying cognitions might disrupt the client's narrative and thus be detrimental to the ongoing action, while perhaps helpful for other reasons. It is often worth considering obtaining a video- or audio-recording of the counseling session and using it to return to the client's narrative. Called the self-confrontation interview (Young, Valach, Dillabough, Dover, & Matthes, 1994), it involves playing the video- or audio-recording back to the client and inquiring about his or her feelings, thoughts, and sensations (Young et al., 2006, 2007). It is important to conduct this self-confrontation as soon as possible following the counseling session because the time span of one's working memory is limited. It is also important to present the recording in short segments (0.5–3 min) to animate the client's description and avoid his or her general summarizing and drawing inferences. Sometimes it is necessary and possible to go through the whole recoding segment-by-segment, other times certain key utterances or actions can be played back. Whether the recall is recorded depends on the requirements of the intended use.

The range of client responses to their viewing of or listening to the recording are usually helpful, however, there are different types of responses. The reporting of thoughts and feelings the client experienced during the video sequence can be taken for granted, as that is what they are invited to provide. However, clients will also justify their actions, rationalize, or explain why they had certain thoughts and feelings.

Popadiuk and colleagues (Popadiuk, Young, & Valach, 2008) asked counselors in focus groups about their experience with the self-confrontation procedure. They reported experiencing the self-confrontation procedure positively as a process through which one could work with a client's emotions and cognitions and contextualized them in the client's narrative and self. These counselors were surprised by the intensity of the procedure and its facility to bring layered inner experience to the surface quickly. They saw the procedure as a means to honor and deal with this inner experience, freeing clients and helping them with their inner work. Their experiences suggested that clients need an ability to concentrate on, and have access

to feelings and meta-cognitions for the successful use of the self-confrontation. Focusing on the here-and-now during the self-confrontation allowed the participants in the self-confrontation to enter their work more "deeply." Popadiuk and colleagues summarized the counselors' comments in regard to the use of the self-confrontation in the therapeutic process: allows for client reflection, uncovers thoughts and feelings previously hidden; is a self-generating therapeutic process, client sees self in new ways; is a specific activity to join with client, honors inner experience, quickly deepens experience, intensifies the process, builds insight, increases information exponentially, encourages self-efficacy, and identifies suicidal triggers. Obviously, as any other procedure in counseling, the use of video-recording and the self-confrontation interview require proper and thorough introduction as well as closing reflections in order to prevent any detrimental effects.

Observing

It is obvious that counselors use scientific–professional observational skills in their practice. Typically, they have learned observational skills, see certain behaviors in the light of their knowledge of certain theories, and can repeatedly depict and label certain behaviors or behavioral segments with high reliability. From a contextual action-theory perspective, it is important that counselors are able to define meaningful units of the counseling process and clients' behavior; that they can attribute important client identity goals and identify with some reliability client expressed feelings. Thus, the counselor can see the beginning and the end of an action as well as the action itself, can answer the question "how does the client want to be seen?" and "what is the feeling the client is experiencing?" For example, it takes considerable experience before students in psychology can attribute feelings to clients without a large standard deviation, making such a clinical judgment nearly a coincidental guess.

Counselors also use naive observation. Naïve observation enables us to obtain information on processes in which the counselor did not participate, and is therefore uninformed. Savickas (American Psychological Association, DVD, n.d.) used naïve observation when he inquired of a young female client about the significant events in her biography. Counselors use naïve observation most often when dealing with clients from a culture, subculture, or communication community with which the counselor is less familiar. This is not a question of obtaining translation of the language but of gaining insight into procedural conventions, what actions mean to the client and others in the client's life. Clients frequently contextualize what they are about to say by introducing the material with phrases such as, "You have to understand what 'going to university' means in my family."

It is important that counselors inform themselves about transition-to-adulthood processes and not only rely exclusively on verbal reports about these processes (such as asking a culturally competent informant about what is going on in the transition-to-adulthood process in the particular culture). Counselors can learn about these processes by dealing with ongoing processes, which are part of the target transition process, such as a young person's conversation with parents, peers, teachers, counselors, or other professionals or laymen. It also can be informative to show specific

relevant conversations to naïve observers from the same communication community. Even more importantly, counselors cannot rely on their intuition when dealing with nomothetic even if meaningful phenomena. Asking one or a few informers for a description of the target phenomena can be advantageous. Ultimately, in order to intervene in an adolescent transition project, we are interested in seeing the relevant joint actions that comprise the client's projects. We want to know what is involved in executing joint actions that contribute to projects. It is well known that there are significant differences between how we reflect about our behavior and how we behave.

Counseling's First Task: Linking Counseling and Transition (Life Processes)

The important processes in clients' lives are those experienced prior to counseling and those that will continue after counseling, hopefully in improved ways. A key step in creating the link between the client–counselor encounter and the client's previous and future actions, projects, and career is by providing a space for an extensive client narrative. This narrative can be facilitated in such a way that the basic frame of reference the client uses, that is, the frame of goal-directed processes, is protected and nourished. Unfortunately, this narrative construction can be broken, be it through counselor demanding details in an order not compatible with the client's construction of his or her narrative or because the counselor does not implement supportive interventions or does not recognize and acknowledge the client's identity goals and emotions. When the narrative construction is frustrated in this way, it is very difficult to reach an effective working alliance within goal-directed systems. Often this can result in the client either terminating the process or the intervention not having a sustainable impact.

Counselors have to become a part of the joint goal-directed processes clients bring with them. Equally, counselors have to be able to use their professional knowledge in these systems in order to support their clients in pursuing their life-facilitating and socially constructive goals. For example, in the case illustration, the counselor joins the client in establishing the goals of counseling as a joint project. She empowers the client to take a responsible position in the counseling project that then allows the client to see the link between the counseling relationship project and the family relationship project that is of concern to her. The counseling relationship also allows the counselor and client to challenge the client's relationship with her family visibly through the counseling relationship. In turn, the challenges become the focus of their joint work in counseling.

Counseling's Second Task: Identifying Systems and Levels of Projects and Action

Counselors should be able to see and identify the order of actions, projects, and careers in the client's various walks of life as well as those relevant other people

who participate in them with the client (Young, Ball, Valach, Turkel, & Wong, 2003). These walks of life include work and life (Richardson, 1993), suicide and life-facilitating process (Valach, Michel, Young, & Dey, 2006b), mothering and mattering (Schultheiss, 2009), vocational life and peers relationship (Young, Antal, Bassett, Post, DeVries, & Valach, 1999), health (Young et al., 2000, 2001) and many more. Counselors have to recognize that their clients are engaged in both health promoting actions, projects, and career (Valach, Young, & Lynam, 1996) and life-limiting and health-detrimental actions, projects, and careers, such as drug abuse (Graham et al., 2008; Valach & Badertscher, 1996).

Once a fuller understanding of the client's actions, projects, and career is achieved, the counselor will be able to distinguish, with the client, all the dimensions of the problems that are present in the client's life, as well as the resources that the client has, or does not have, to address these problems. In the case example, we saw that the client initially presented an issue about her occupational choice and balancing work and educational perspectives. A fuller expansion of that issue relative to her actions, projects, and career included significant relationship issues with her family.

Counselors can identify the individual levels within these systems, that is, the goals, functions, and elements of the actions, projects, and career. For example, one or both parties may present the problem of emotional conflict between parent and youth over a young person's lifestyle, which may be identified as a project at the level of emotional regulation by them. Counselors can also develop the distinction between problems and resources at each of these levels within the individual systems; for example, a steering problem differs from regulation processes.

When following this order, counselors can also realize that the sequencing of counseling into sub-processes such as relationship building, assessment, goal setting, intervention, evaluation, and closure might be logical or rational or a premeditated plan of counseling, but it is not the order in which one engages in these processes. Relationship building interventions have to be engaged in all the time, though perhaps not consistently with the same intensity or in the same way. While clients with some symptoms of borderline personality disorder might be testing the client–counselor relationship all the time, other clients might be not as questioning. Assessing is a competence counselors have to apply throughout the counseling process. Attending to goals is required throughout the joint work as there is no time without goals. Equally, evaluating and providing feedback is also needed, though at different levels during the entire counseling collaboration. For example, the counselor might evaluate an action-step intervention through reading the client's nonverbal behavior. The evaluation of an action or several actions of a counseling session could be a topic of discussion between the client and the counselor. The evaluation of the full sequence of counseling sessions might be made using a formal evaluation protocol.

Counselors are also engaged, at the same time as they are working with clients, in goal-directed systems of their own professional career and projects as well as in the systems of their organization, agency, or other professional body they work for or are associated with. Thus, often some part of the evaluation and assessment is

performed as a function of their professional or organizational goals. At the same time, counselors know that important aspects of the evaluation of their work lie in supervision.

In identifying systems and levels of action, the counselor does not seek to identify the definitive variable causing the client's difficulties. Rather, she helps the client to make the action and project systems viable through the joint reworking these systems in a contextual way. Closely connected to this contextual way of reworking systems is the notion of constructionism. Constructionist counselors understand that clients as well as counselors are constructing their social reality (Young & Valach, 1994; Young, Valach, & Marshall, 2008). Further, we suggest that everyday construction is the key process we have to deal with and that this construction happens in joint social actions, projects, and careers. Thus, changes in the client's life will not occur by simply trying to clear or delete what appear to be obstacles. The sought-for course of action and project has to be repeatedly constructed to become operational at all levels of how the action and project are organized.

Relational Perspective

As indicated above, the majority of the processes counselors deal with are joint processes and thus the relational perspective in counseling is very appropriate (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Schultheiss, 2003; Valach & Young, 2009). The implication of the relational view impacts how we see processes (ontology) (it is the relationship between "things" and the individual "things" that are relevant), how we understand the process of obtaining information on the targeted phenomena (epistemology) (in relating to the target processes), and what we consider ethical (ethics) (what is facilitating the relationships). It also helps us respect the way clients understand their own and others' behavior, as it stresses the importance of relationship over abstract principles as the basis for ethical conduct.

Assessing and Intervening

Assessing and intervening are not separate processes in counseling. Most assessments impact clients in some way. Any methods that counselors use to generate information have to be considered an intervention as well. Without suggesting that there are no differences between assessment and intervention, we also acknowledge that it is difficult, and perhaps unwise, for counselors to maintain a strict intervention–assessment distinction. In our view, any assessment is also an intervention and assessment is implicit in every intervention. Both should be used in a facilitating way.

Counseling's Third Task: Dealing with Emotion and Emotional Memory

Closely related to the specification and differentiation of the possible problem and resources areas is the example of dealing with emotions, particularly with

emotional memories within actions, projects, and careers. As emotions are important in our life, they also have to be allowed to occur and be actively used in the counseling process. The contextual action-theory approach recognizes the relevance of emotional processes within the goal-directed processes (Young, Paseluikho, & Valach, 1997).

Although the division between rational or cognitive and emotional processes as separate events has been rejected, some memory events anchored in traumatizing experiences can be seen more specifically as emotional processes. The person's quick holistic monitoring of events, which has been attributed to emotional processes, can be deterred by emotional memory. These emotional memories may not be identified as such by the client. Thus, an everyday situation can become frightening, with the consequence that the client disengages from the ongoing processes or copes with the fear in another, perhaps even in a detrimental way. These are often the situations or complaints clients present as difficulties or insecurities. Clients can also initially describe them in counseling as a lack of information, for example, a client might say, "if only I knew more about what women were like, I wouldn't be so afraid of getting involved with them." Savickas (APA, n.d.), in his approach to career counseling, demonstrated a way to help the client bypass these inhibitions without conceptualizing this issue as emotional memory. He was concerned that addressing emotional memory might push career counseling into the sphere of psychotherapy (Savickas, 2008, Personal communication, Chicago, March 7). We believe that emotional memory is an important issue in counseling, without necessarily having it become a clinical symptom. It is readily addressed in contextual action theory by analyzing and dealing with the processes within actions and projects as well as looking at the issue of long-term career in various areas of life. For example, experiencing that something had gone badly wrong when I took initiative in my childhood could evoke such an emotional memory of fear whenever I take initiative later in my life and is, consequently, detrimental to the actions and projects in question. A client's experience of unsuccessful attempts to stop bed-wetting could have impacted his ability to process goal-directed actions with adequate emotions for many years.

Closely related to the issue of emotional memory impacting certain relevant actions within projects and career is the problem of linking various careers in different areas of life. Contextual action theory allows us to see the connection between different areas of life such as work and personal life as a linking and intertwining of various careers and projects with different emotional textures. The linking and intertwining are reflected in both the facilitative and successful and the destructive and unsuccessful engagements of clients in life projects and careers. For example, a young student repeating his final year in a university preparatory school for the third time seems to be very casual about his exam preparation. His unhappy, suicidal, alcoholic mother not only blamed him for all her unhappiness and everything what went wrong, but also kept him substantially occupied with her problems. In response, the young man adopted the goal of not being successful and thus is currently showing her that this time it is her fault that he is in a difficult situation. We assume and observe in our practical work and in everyday life that people are engaged in life-facilitating and life-detrimental processes. Although these processes

are all goal-directed and, thus, follow the rules of top–down steering, the links between these processes can also occur as bottom–up steering often understood as impulsive or affective response (see for details Chapter 13 as well as Valach et al., 2006b). Notwithstanding the importance of linking careers in various areas of life, it remains challenging for counselors to identify the relevant links and to help clients to develop the successful strategies when emotional memory is involved.

Counseling's Fourth Task: Dealing with Suboptimal and Detrimental Actions, Projects, and Careers

Clients and counselors are continually confronted with the issues of how to deal with suboptimal and detrimental actions, projects, and careers. In our view it is not simply a matter of trying to identify the causes of these actions. Rather, the frame in which counselors look at their clients' issues and how to address them in counseling is much more complex than suggested by a causal explanation. This contextual complexity is often expressed in everyday life with the phrase "it all depends."

Consider of the political maxim, "people vote with their feet" or the saying, "actions speak louder than words." These sayings reflect procedural rather than reflective thinking. The latter is closer to human experience and everyday thinking. In some cases reflective thinking, that is what we say about our actions, or how we rationalize them, can actually retard growth and change. Thus, the focus in counseling from a contextual action-theory perspective is on actions, projects, and careers, which reveal in their complexity both suboptimal and detrimental aspects and facilitative and growth-enhancing ones.

Growth, development, abnormality, measurement, work role, and tests, among others, are concepts which sound plausible but prove difficult in counseling contexts particularly when they are embedded in a causal framework. Growth is a biological term, development is mostly associated with ontogeny and physiological processes, abnormality does not sound like a social convention, rather it suggests pathology, measurement is a difficult process in counseling if taken in its original meaning of physical measurement, role is closely related to a theory which is entertaining but fully misleading as far as the understanding of social life is concerned, and tests are mostly justified more by the possibility of elegant statistical processing of their results than by their relevance and ecological validity. Equipped with this series of conceptual dead-ends, prospective counselors can feel helpless. The helplessness some counselors experience may result to some degree from their confusion when confronted with practical tasks after participating for some years in mainstream theoretical narratives.

Counseling's Fifth Task: Creating and Maintaining the Working Alliance

Emphasis on the client–counselor relationship has persisted in counseling and psychotherapy research and practice, and has been found to be critical to successful

outcomes. Several ways of conceptualizing this relationship have emerged in the literature. Freud's (1954) transference and countertransference as well as Gelso's and Samstag (2008) real relationship, characterized by genuineness and authenticity, can be seen as "just happening" in the counseling relationship. Nevertheless in both cases, the intentionality of both participants is recognized, although these conceptualizations have not been unpacked from the perspective of goal-directed processes. In contrast, the working alliance (Horvath & Greenberg, 1994) is a goal-directed process and joint project. Thus, the working alliance becomes an important paradigm for understanding and acting on the relationship in counseling as well as providing an important model for goal-directed processes generally in counseling.

Once in a relationship, counseling skills can apply. Ladany and Inman (2008) list a number of them. They identify as helping skills training models such as the Human Relations Training or Integrated Didactic Experiential Training (Carkhuff, 1971, based on Rogers, 1957), Microcounseling Skills Training (Ivey, 1971), the Interpersonal Process Recall (Kagan, 1984), and Hill's Helping Skills Model (Hill, 2004; Hill & O'Brian, 1999). These approaches to counseling skills contribute to the counseling process and conceptualize counseling as a goal-directed system. At the same time, these models have provided a narrow view of counseling as a goal-directed system. For example, it has been pointed out that they do not pay attention to higher order skills such as the self-awareness of counselor (Albert & Edelstein, 1990), do not conceptualize trainee experience (Nerdrum & Ronnestad, 2002), and do not pay attention to handling particular situations or challenges in counseling such as cultural issues (Ladany, Inman, Constantine, & Hofheinz, 1997).

Conclusion

Counseling practice informed by contextual action theory is an integrative rather than eclectic approach. It does not stress certain principles as the most important and reject others as misleading. It provides a systemic and dynamic-process frame of joint human activity in which many propositions and methods developed in other approaches can be integrated. The advantage for practitioners informed by contextual action theory is that they can describe and understand the processes they encounter with clients and not just identify shortcomings that clients seek to change.

Contextual action theory can help in developing the following counselors' competencies: counselors can respect the relevance of projects in which their clients are engaged in their everyday life; they can integrate the counselor–client encounter into these projects and career; they know about the relevance of joint actions and projects as well as the relationships between the client and the counselor, and can contribute to their quality. Counselors also know the importance of respecting the clients' narratives and are aware of their systemic qualities. Counselors understand the difference between reporting on an action or project and engaging in such an action and project. In identifying relevant actions, projects, and careers, counselors can also distinguish their resources and shortcomings. They can deal with the steering, controlling, regulating, monitoring, and energizing processes of the target actions,

projects, and career. They can choose appropriate interventions, paying attention to characteristics of these processes, such as degree of consciousness, clarity of the goals, the functionality of chosen strategies.

Counselors can apply interventions dealing with action processes through thoughts, feelings, habits, desensitization, motor action, reflections, self-attention, and many others, using various techniques such as a dialogue, writing, audio- or video-recording and replay, role-playing, educative and suggestive techniques, computer-supported interventions, and a variety of abstract, specific, and everyday-related tasks. However, the implementation of these interventions is not driven by the techniques associated with them. Rather these interventions are directed by the tasks and goals that arise in the counseling encounter.

Chapter 4
Studying Transition Processes

The way one conceptualizes the transition to adulthood suggests the methods that one would use to study it. For example, sociology's life-course approach emphasizes how socially structured opportunities and limitations explain differences in the duration and sequencing of events associated with the transition to adulthood. The life-course approach studies the specific order of events that structure a person's life, including life stages and transitions, as well as formal institutions and cultural values that contribute to that structure. Here a cause – effect relationship between limitations, opportunities, and some of the structurally defined properties of the transition (duration) are monitored and analyzed. Often retrospective recollection of the opportunities, limitations, and the duration of the transition provide data for the analysis. Such studies are often either cross-sectional (one time point measured) or longitudinal (two or more time points measured). Many questionnaire-based studies are complemented by some qualitative studies mainly relying on retrospective narrative accounts. Anthropological approaches to the transition to adulthood study how physiological changes are acknowledged in culturally structured events that, in turn, recognize the individual's readiness for incorporation into adult social groupings or roles (e.g., Schlegel & Barry, 1991; van Gennep, 1909/1960). Social recognition during structured events highlights the salience of community relationships. Phenomenological approaches examine the meaning of adulthood as well as self-descriptors (e.g., being responsible) during the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 1997; Arnett & Taber, 1994; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Shanahan et al., 2005). Developmental psychological and social psychological approaches (e.g., Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Reitzle, 2007; Scharf et al., 2004) emphasize personal characteristics such as agency or the subjective experience of adulthood to explain differences in individuals' pathways into or out of social positions or roles associated with adulthood. Psychological approaches also study personality characteristics, which are assumed to be relatively stable, as impacting the outcome of the transition process (e.g., Cohen et al., 2005).

In general then, the emphasis in studying transition to adulthood across social science disciplines is on individuals. The conceptualization of social relationships plays a minor role in most research on the transition to adulthood. It also is often assumed that both objective and subjective transition information and events are

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freely accessible and reproducible by research participants either in questionnaires or narratives. In addition, the transition is often seen as a result of the causal impact of some variables or as an event or a series of events, and not as a goal-directed process. Thus, not only are longitudinal measures seldom used, but when they are employed, they contain only a few discrete measurement points. Further, transition is seldom defined, fully including manifest, social, and subjective processes.

We propose an approach to the transition to adulthood based on the joint action between individuals that over time coalesce to construct transition to adulthood projects (see also Domene & Young, 2008; Valach, Young, et al., 2002; and Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005; for detailed descriptions of the method). Our conception goes beyond individual processes. It assumes joint goal-directed processes and includes manifest, social, and subjective processes. The focus of the cases reported in this book is on the joint action of several youth, parents, and counselors who are engaged in one way or another in making the transition to adulthood or with those making the transition. Thus, this conceptualization calls for methods to study the transition to adulthood in a longitudinal way, accounting for joint goal-directed processes.

In describing how we studied the transition processes reported in this book, it is important to underline that we were interested in monitoring these processes as they occurred in everyday life, in a way in which would be compatible with counselors' work. We also hope that the method allows counselors to implement this view in their work. In our studies we put a high priority on participants not being used in the research process as uninformed, passive subjects, easily manipulated. Rather, we approached and engaged them in these research studies as active, informed, self-responsible, self-determined, and empowered human beings participating in social relationships and in the social construction of their lives. It also was relevant for us that we formulated research questions relevant to the participants' lives. Two examples from our research illustrate the method we have used.

Example 1

Consider the case of an 18-year-old woman and her mother who volunteered to participate in a research study on how parents and youth work together to facilitate youth's transition to adulthood. The young woman is in Grade 12 and works part-time on the weekends. She plans to attend university in the following academic year and she aspires to become a schoolteacher. Her parents are immigrants to Canada from Asia. The mother works as an instructor.

This mother and daughter began their participation by responding to an advertisement for research participants with a telephone call to our research team in which the nature of their involvement was explained, preliminary data and agreement to participate was obtained. Both mother and daughter participated in this telephone interview separately and agreement to participate was obtained separately for each of them. A face-to-face meeting with two research assistants followed the telephone

interview. This meeting consisted of a warm-up or introductory interview with the youth, her mother, and two research assistants. Its purpose was to identify the topics of conversations that the mother and daughter are having relevant to the daughter's transition to adulthood. Inviting the youth to describe her current life and activities as well as her short- and long-term aspirations facilitated identifying these topics. Then her mother was invited to comment on her role in what her daughter has just described. Once two or three topics were identified, these research participants were invited to have a video-recorded conversation on one of them without the researchers' present. In this case, the mother and daughter had a 17-minute conversation that covered a range of topics including logistics of the daughter's prom, negotiating about expenses, issues about continuing to live in, or move out of, the family home, and time management.

Immediately following the conversation, the mother and daughter were interviewed separately by one of the researchers. In this procedure, called the self-confrontation interview, the video of the conversation was played back and stopped every minute by the research assistant, who asked the participant to recall her thoughts and feelings for that minute that they had just viewed on the video (see also Chapter 15 for an extensive discussion of the use of the self-confrontation procedure in counseling). For example, in her self-confrontation interview, the mother recalled for a particular minute of the conversation:

> At this point, when she's, when I threw out the whole array of subjects that she wanted to talk about this, so I thought, that's a good thing to talk about. And these are kind of difficult things we will talk about at home and so I thought, we can go by that. And I was thinking, will it qualify in your transition to adult kind of thing. So I wasn't quite sure. I thought. . .

Later in the self-confrontation, the mother recalled her feelings when the conversation had turned to the difficult topic of finances:

> . . .so then I kind of – when I saw that, I try to calm . . . but my voice and my tone – I realize that I don't have a good voice. I don't have a good calming voice. I have a very excitable voice, so I try to be calm and when I sense that she's not too . . . because I do want to keep the conversation going and not have her shut down. . .

The record of these procedures were subsequently transcribed and analyzed in conjunction with the video-recordings. The two research assistants who had collected the data with this mother and daughter, which is described later in this chapter, undertook the analysis. Subsequently, the research team reviewed their analysis to ensure consensus and consistency across analyses in the study. The analysis resulted in three narrative summaries written in the everyday language of goals, steps, and behaviors. One narrative was from each of the perspectives of the daughter and her mother, and a joint narrative summary, which tentatively identified the joint transition to adulthood project in which this mother and daughter were engaged. In this case, the joint project was briefly identified as "promoting the daughter's independence by means of collaboration and cooperation."

About 2 months after the initial data collection procedure, this mother and daughter met with the two researchers again to review their individual and joint narratives, to consider the tentative identification of the joint project, and to make any changes

in it. In this case, both mother and daughter were in agreement with the project as identified from the analysis of their data. They were then invited to monitor this project over the next 6 months by completing a log whenever they engaged in a conversation or an action pertinent to the project and by responding to researcher-initiated telephone calls every 2 weeks to provide further data on the progress of their joint project. In this case, the daughter responded to eight telephone interviews with the researcher, while the mother completed six. Neither participant completed any logs.

Following the 6-month monitoring period, the youth and her mother attended a final face-to-face data collection session in which they were invited to have another joint conversation on their project followed by self-confrontation interviews, as described above. Finally, there was a short debriefing interview in which any outstanding issues for the participants were discussed. The whole data set was transcribed and analyzed.

The focus of the data-gathering procedure is to gather the actual joint actions that people engage in during the transition to adulthood. In the case described above, the actions are the conversations that the mother and daughter engaged in together that they considered as relevant to the transition. Inasmuch as these actions coalesced across time in terms of shared meaning, we could identify them as a joint project.

Example 2

Of course, transition to adulthood involves joint actions and projects with people other than the youth's parents. Counseling is one such joint action and project, which is one of the foci of this book. The following case illustrates how we collected data in counseling for the transition to adulthood project from an action-theoretical perspective.

In this case, a 21-year-old female university student volunteers to receive four counseling sessions in which she is able to discuss issues pertinent to the transition to adulthood. A professional counselor with experience working with clients in this age group offered the counseling. The client in this instance wants to resolve career issues and to gain greater independence from her parents – issues that she saw as related.

Both the counselor and the client had agreed to have their counseling video-recorded and to participate in the other aspects of the research study. The counseling proceeds under the theoretical and professional competence of the counselor. However, following each session, both the client and the counselor participate with one of the researchers in the self-confrontation interview described earlier. In this case, the researchers identified a 15-minute segment of the counseling session for review in the self-confrontation interview. These segments were randomly determined, but were the same for both the client and the counselor, and neither the client nor the counselor knew beforehand what 15-minute segment was to be reviewed. Data from each counseling session and the corresponding self-confrontation

interviews were transcribed and analyzed using procedures described below. At the beginning of the third counseling session, the researcher met briefly with the counselor and client to identity a tentative counseling project that the researchers had identified on the basis of the analysis of the first two counseling sessions. In this case, the tentative statement of the joint counseling project was to explore family and childhood issues that may be influencing the client's decision-making process, particularly the conflict between two career options that the client is considering. The counselor and client were free to use or ignore the information provided.

The Action-Project Method

This research method represents an alternative to the traditional ways in which the transition to adulthood has been studied, as we briefly reviewed earlier in this chapter. It reflects the actual goal-directed experiences of young people who are actively engaged in this transition. In reflecting on these experiences, the method undertakes to respond to the complexity that is involved in the transition to adulthood.

In previous chapters, we described contextual action theory, which serves as the conceptual framework for understanding the transition. The action-project method is an open, holistic, and flexible approach that reflects this conceptual framework. We have engaged in a range of studies in which this method has been developed and refined. Some of these studies have dealt explicitly with the transition to adulthood, others with younger adolescents, their parents, with topics that anticipate the transition to adulthood as well as other pertinent topics such as health.

Formulating Research Questions

Our studies have been guided by specific research questions generated from the literature and consistent with the conceptualization of transition to adulthood as a goal-directed joint project. For example, in one study, we formulated the research questions as follows:

> How do the joint actions of parents and youth facilitate the transition of youth from school to post school activities and engagement?
>
> How do youth and their parents jointly construct, articulate, and act on goals and strategies pertinent to the transition to post school life? (Young et al., 2008, p. 298)

The first task in formulating these research questions is to conceptualize the transition to adulthood as goal-directed action and series of actions. The previous chapters readily make apparent that a goal-directed conceptualization is warranted and may be generative for studying the transition to adulthood, as well as other phenomena.

Unit of Analysis

Action, specifically the joint conversations between parents and youth and counselors and youth, was the unit of analysis we employed in most of the cases reported in this book. We assumed, however, that transition to adulthood encompassed a complex series of actions, best understood as a project or projects. Thus, while the unit of analysis began with the joint action of youth with either parents or counselors, we undertook to gather a series of them so that we would have data on what the participants saw as a common joint project over time.

Data Gathering

By video-recording the actual joint actions between parents and youth and counselors and youth, we are able to meet the criterion that data be considered from the three perspectives on action, that is, manifest behavior, internal processes, and social meaning. We also collected data at subsequent time points over a 6- to 8-month period for the parent–youth studies and over four counseling sessions for the counselor youth study, making our data not only longitudinal but also representing joint projects. These different kinds of data are illustrated in Fig. 4.1. Specifically, video-recordings of the actual conversations between the participants captured the manifest behavior of the action. The video-recording of manifest behavior provides a starting point for gathering data, moment by moment, on subjective processes occurring during the recorded conversation. In the case of counseling, the action was deemed to be the counseling conversation between the counselor and the client. For the study of the parent–youth transition to adulthood study, the action was the conversation between the parent and youth. These were supplemented across time with participant log and researcher-initiated telephone monitoring. Data on internal processes were gathered through a video-supported recall of the participant's thoughts, feelings, and sensations, called the

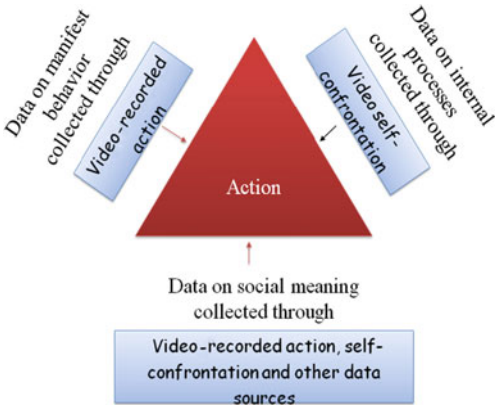

Fig. 4.1 Data sources and means of data collection using the action-project method (Young et al., 2005, p. 219). Reprinted with permission Journal of Counseling Psychology

self-confrontation interview. Finally, the social meaning of the action was accessed through the participant's perceptual comments about the action at various times during the data-gathering processes including during the self-confrontation, initial, and final interviews. The data from these sources allowed us to construct rich, detailed descriptions of the transition-to-adulthood process as a joint project between both parents and youth and counselors and youth.

Data Sources

Video-recording served to capture the manifest behavior between parent and youth and counselor and youth. These recordings provided material for obtaining information on subjective processes in the self-confrontation procedure. In the parent–youth studies, manifest behavior was also reported through logs kept by the participants and the researcher-initiated telephone monitoring of the participants. In the case of both the participant logs and the telephone monitoring, behavioral reports are provided from the participant's perspective and are retrospective, but the primary data is actual ongoing action between the participants in the form of joint actions.

Gathering concurrent cognitions and emotions that the participant experienced during the action augmented manifest behavior data. These cognitions and emotions were accessed by replaying the videotape of the action, stopping it approximately every minute, and asking the participant to recall the thoughts and feelings they had during that moment in the conversation. This procedure, called the self-confrontation, has connections with similar procedures, for example, Bloom's (1954) procedure using audiotape and Kagan's (1984) Interpersonal Process Recall have been used extensively in training and research. Our use of this procedure is embedded in our conceptualization of action and serves as one perspective on the action. The procedure is guided by two general questions, which are, "What were you thinking during that segment of the conversation?" and "What were you feeling during that segment of the conversation?" The self-confrontation procedure was conducted with both participants. In combining data on manifest actions and the subjective processes we achieved better insight and understanding of the ongoing internal and external processes that contribute to an action. However, this understanding could not be achieved without referring to the social meaning of these processes.

Data about the social meaning attributed to the action is usually collected through naïve observation in which members of a communication community describe ongoing behaviors. In these studies, these data emerged in the self-confrontation procedure, as participants not only provided specific recall of their thoughts and feelings, but commented on the meaning of their own and other's actions for them. For example, in this segment from the self-confrontation of the conversation cited earlier, the mother explained to the researcher, who is not Asian, the meaning of her parenting behavior:

> Yeah and I do. I do, because I sometimes . . . I mean well and then my Asian parenting skills will come in and then I will be so task focused, task oriented and then I forget that it's about

> the relationship. It's not about keeping budget. So I have to tell myself and that's okay. So it's hard for me to – but I do conscientiously try to have a calmer voice in that kind of . . . situation. . . . This is Canadian.

In the studies involving parents and adolescents, data about the social meaning of actions were also gathered in the participant logs, the telephone monitoring, and the initial warm-up and debriefing interviews.

Implementing Procedures

The action-project method was implemented in slightly different ways for the study of parent–youth joint actions and counselor–client joint actions. However, both involved video-recording the conversations between the participants, that is, the action.

In the case of the study of parent–youth joint projects regarding the transition to adulthood, this data-gathering procedure included an introductory interview between the participants and two members of our research team. The purpose of these interviews was to facilitate a conversation between the parent and youth about a topic important to them and relevant to the transition to adulthood by tapping into the youth's goals and current activities, and how both parents and youth were involved in helping to realize them. Parents were asked explicitly, "How are you involved in helping (youth's name) realize his or her goals?" This initial conversation generated a conversation or conversations that could readily be carried on independently by the participants: For example, in the mother–daughter project described earlier in this chapter, the daughter described the kind and topics of their joint conversations in the introductory interview as follows:

> I think more of my future, my education. We talk about that quite a lot. Um, we do talk sometimes, like, she'll be watching Dr. Phil or Oprah and then I'll come have a seat with her and, you know, when she can sense that I've got something important to say or just want to chat, then she'll turn off the TV and we'll have some mom-daughter time, and we just talk about, like, how I'm feeling with my friends or stuff at church. Not really so much guy relationships but more my friends and my circle.

In the parent–youth studies, the researcher suggested to the participants that their conversation could last about 15 min, but they were instructed that they could take as much or as little time as they wanted to have the conversation. In effect the mean time for the initial parent–youth conversations in the Young et al.'s (2008) study was 12.9 minutes. The final conversations in this research were an average of 13.6 minutes.

The parent–youth conversations were followed by separate self-confrontation interviews with the parent and youth on their immediately preceding conversation (described above). These conversations were further supplemented with logs that parents and youth were invited to keep, in which they were asked to record actions, events, and thoughts on joint actions relevant to their transition to adulthood project.

The procedures used in the counseling for transition to adulthood study also gather data about social meaning, internal processes, and manifest behavior. In

this instance, the manifest behavior was the counseling between the counselor and the young person about what the latter saw as a transition-to-adulthood concern. Internal processes and social meaning were gathered through the self-confrontation procedure for a random selected 15-minute segment of the counseling session.

Analysis

In order to answer the research questions we posed in these studies, we sought to describe the transition to adulthood actions and projects that were shared between parents and youth or in counseling. By describing these in great detail and seeing several related actions over time, we were able to infer transition-to-adulthood projects. The project was not arrived at asking the participants "what is the most important project you are involved in?" but was inferred from the joint actions in which the participants engaged in their conversation. This is a substantial difference from many other studies as we conceptualize that these projects are based on performative (on what people actually do) processes and are not a perfect execution of premeditated processes. The analysis begins with description, and ends with identifying how these projects are organized, that is, how they fit within the larger configuration of life projects, how they are steered, controlled, and regulated, and the internal and external resources needed for their implementation. The analysis of these transition-to-adulthood actions resembles a hermeneutic process (e.g., Packer, 1985), although not working primarily with texts, in which there is a back and forth movement between the data we had collected and the action theory framework enunciated earlier in the book. The analysis proceeds from description to organization. It begins with "detailed, progressive descriptions of episodes of social interchange and gradually articulates more and more of their organization" (Packer, p. 1,089). The purpose in the analysis of the transition to adulthood used in this book is to describe the actions that occurred and to identify how similar actions across time are organized to form joints projects.

In analyzing parent–youth conversations or client–counselor counseling sessions, we considered all the data sources simultaneously. Two members of our respective research teams worked together to intensively analyze the data record for each case. These initial analyses were then reviewed by the entire research team and discussed until consensus was reached. In this analysis, the research team studied the goal-directed processes by identifying and coding action elements (level 3) and functionally defined action steps (level 2) in meaningful units of action (level 1). While the subjective data from the self-confrontation interview was used directly in the description of the observed processes, the work with data on social meaning needs special consideration. Social meaning is derived from naive observation.

Naïve Observation

The participants in these studies could be said to approach the recorded actions without systematic scientific propositions. Thus, they were able to describe the

processes using their everyday language. This is an important component of our research approach. It underlines that our analysis is neither presented as definitive, objective truth independent from our inquiry nor that we are studying solely physically defined data. Our analysis is rooted in the social meaning of a given communication community's knowledge of processes. In studies in which members of cultural and communicative communities other than those in which the research team members are involved, we engaged naïve observers to provide us with their informed description of the target processes. In studies with participants from the same communicative groups as the research team, we ourselves often assume the position of naïve observers when describing the target processes at the first viewing. We should also keep in mind that when the research team identified the ongoing action by assuming a participant's individual or joint goal, they described this in a socially meaningful language. In this way they relied on their everyday knowledge and understanding of the social community in which the research participants participate. In addition, we use information provided by the participants when describing the observed actions of others (see also the discussion of naïve observation in Chapter 10).

The Canadian communication community relevant in some of our studies is that of youth in transition to adulthood and their parents. How youth describe the actions of their parents and how they make the ongoing behavior meaningful to them and how parents describe the actions of youth and make ongoing behavior meaningful to them comprise naïve observations. These parents and youth use an everyday action theory in making sense of each other's behavior. Youth use some important concepts for parental actions within the joint parent–youth actions. These concepts include *autonomy*, that is, whether parents are *giving youth control over their own actions,* and whether parents are emotionally hurting such as through *criticizing* or *nagging*, *being fair and just*, *allowing them to be different from the parents*, *letting youth find their own way.* As is evident in subsequent chapters of this book, parents also use a range of concepts to describe their joint actions with youth in transition to adulthood. These concepts may be less salient in other cultures and were less prominent in other historical times where and when many parental and youth behaviors were seen in different ways. Thus, it is easy to understand when parents brought up in a different culture bring up their children in Canada, these children will apply the social conventions of the youth of country of their education. As a result, parents and youth might clash over how to interpret some social conventions. The possibility of differences over interpretation suggests the need to develop a joint cultural project, as evident in our study of the joint cultural projects in Chinese parents of adolescents in Canada (Young et al., 2003).

Analysis Products

Using the analysis procedures described above allowed the researchers to produce several different analysis documents, depending on the particular study. These documents represent the analysis of the data in different ways and are significant steps in arriving at findings. It is important to remember that the research questions guiding

these studies asked for descriptions of actions and projects. These analysis products are various levels of description of the actions and projects we have studied.

In the studies with parents and youth, the first products after the first data collection were parent and youth narratives describing the action of the conversation from the perspective of each of the participants, using lay language that captured the goal-directed nature of the action between them (see also Chapter 14 for a discussion of the use of narratives in counseling youth in transition to adulthood). For example, in the parent–youth joint action referred to previously in this chapter, the following is an excerpt from the two-page youth narrative:

> The daughter's main goals in the conversation included (1) to provide her mother with information and assistance in order to get her permission, (2) to convey her own position, express perceptions about herself, and share her concerns with respect to different issues, for example, moving out and handling adult responsibilities, and (3) when disagreements arise she wanted to express her needs, and to actively engage with her mother in figuring out solutions. She attempted to accomplish her goals by providing information and clarifications, answering and asking questions, and providing explanations. She expressed disagreement with her mother by sharing her thoughts and feelings, describing her opinion, asserting her needs, offering solutions, and responding to her mother's suggestions.

The initial analysis of the joint conversation also resulted in a document in which the joint transition to adulthood project was tentatively described. In the case of this mother and daughter, their joint formulated as:

> Promoting the daughter's independence by means of collaboration and cooperation; negotiating when there are differences in opinion, and working together to find solutions when challenges arise. The mother supports the daughter by offering her thoughts, opinions, and ideas when the daughter shares her experiences, and mother and daughter offer each other ongoing emotional support.

These documents summarizing the joint action are shared with the participants, and verified and/or modified in concert with the researchers.

A second analysis document was produced at the end of the 6- to 8-month involvement of the parents and youth in the parent–youth transition-to-adulthood study in which all the data, including initial and final joint conversations, participant logs, and telephone monitoring data, are summarized. This overall analysis used the following categories to describe the joint parent–youth project: project, parent conceptualization of the project, youth conceptualization of the project, parents' strategies, youth strategies, linkages (that is, the ways in which the project is shared), barriers, and continuation (that is, the anticipated future of the joint project). This analysis document, which includes extensive references to the transcribed data sources, provides the basis for a detailed discussion in the research team of the emerging themes and constructs which are identified and noted. For example, in the case cited, the emerging themes and constructs were identified as follows: balanced initiation and collaboration between mother and daughter in tasks facilitating the transition to adulthood, a close and supportive relationship between them, the mother's awareness of a distinct parenting project, consistency over time in reaching goals, and both culture and religion important in guiding the transition project.

Finally, in the study of parent–youth transition-to-adulthood projects, a cross-case analysis was undertaken by identifying commonalities and differences across cases on the following dimensions: nature of the transition project, relationship, independence, role of parents and youth in the project, parent reflexivity on parenting practice, and financial, physical space, and time consideration, as well as a comparison on the emergent themes and constructs such as the ones identified above.

In the transition to adulthood counseling study, similar analyses were in place, but these were represented in slightly different ways of documenting the description of the projects. The counseling *actions* were analyzed on session-by-session basis. This analysis resulted in (1) a detailed narrative description of each session using the language of goal-directed action, and including supporting quotations from the session as well as the counselor and client self-confrontation interviews, and (2) a short summary. In addition, the across-sessions analysis for each client–counselor was organized and summarized by content, client, and counselor goals, functional steps, joint interaction pattern, joint goals, and other relevant notes. This side-by-side presentation of the analysis for each counseling dyad allowed the identification of changes across sessions for each dyad. In the case of this study, we have been able to describe in detail the joint relationship and identity projects, intertwined with goal-directed projects outside counseling in occupational, educational, and familial domains (Young et al., 2009).

Value and Limitations of the Method

Using this method in several studies, we have been able to describe the process of the transition to adulthood as goal-directed action. The findings and their usefulness are evident in this book and in several studies that have been reported independently (e.g., Marshall, Young, Domene, & Zaidman, 2008; Young et al., 2006, 2008). In the chapters that follow we have concentrated describing individual cases to illustrative aspects and processes in the transition to adulthood. The separately reported journal articles have presented across-case or aggregate findings. In both cases the complexity of the transition to adulthood, and human action generally, is unpacked to some extent by identifying how projects are constructed from, and contribute to, a variety of goals and how these goals are intertwined. The method allowed us to identify the elements (specific behaviors and resources), functional steps, and goals within and across participant dyads. We hope the method highlights for readers the importance of communication, the place of emotion and emotional regulation, and the construction of joint and individual goals in joint transition to adulthood projects.

Notwithstanding the strengths of this method and that it generates empirical data from different perspectives, a number of challenges and limitations exist. The data collection and analysis is labor-intensive. It depends on a research team working collaboratively and consistently. It is to a degree an interpretative method, but in our view justifiably interpretative in light of how people generally engage in and

make sense of human action. The most important criterion is whether and to what extent the cases reported in this book and the analysis we have made of them are meaningful to you as readers and transferable to your work with young people in the process of moving from adolescence to adulthood.

Conclusion

Transition to adulthood can be conceptualized as a goal-directed joint action and project. These actions and projects occur between youth and others, notably in the case of the material discussed in this book, between youth and their parents and between youth and their counselors. We have described in this chapter how we accessed and analyzed these actions and processes. The method stems from and is highly consistent with how we conceptualize both the transition to adulthood and counseling, as well as other human actions. In addition, the method has aspects that extend beyond its use as a research method. In subsequent chapters we describe how a number of these research procedures can be used effectively in the counseling practice.

Chapter 5
Relationships

Humans are born into relationships. We have a strong need to belong to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), making personal relationships a vital aspect of human life (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Relating and being in relationship are primary conditions of human development including development of certain brain structures and neuronal density. Humans develop not only language and social competencies in relationships, but also the ability to act in a goal-directed manner, the ability to steer, control, and regulate behavior, to monitor and reflect on their behavior, and to develop emotional competencies.

Good relationships are beneficial for people. There is a well-documented association between satisfying relationships and physical health (e.g., Berkman, 1995; Myers, 1999). Conversely, relationships can be detrimental during the transition to adulthood and other times in life (Valach et al., 2006a). When relationships are good, they can be important resources during periods of change such as the entry into adulthood. Individuals are more likely to successfully navigate life transitions if they are able to rely on others for support (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994).

Much of the literature on relationships during the transition to adulthood focuses on what relationships "do" for youth or what youth "do" to relationships. Although the research is informative, it yields information about single individuals' behavior rather than understanding relationships. Here, action theory is useful because it focuses our attention on the ways in which two or more people engage over both the mid-term and long-term. It also helps us understand relationships as joint projects and careers. Joint relationship projects can be about, occur within, and serve and are served by family (see Chapter 8), romantic partnerships (see Chapter 11), friendships, or with co-workers. Joint relationship projects are not defined solely by the a priori intentions of their individual members, they are defined by social and communicative processes in which actions, intentions, and goals occur.

This chapter is about the processes that are found across different relationships including relationships during the transition to adulthood. We begin this chapter by describing relationships in the tradition of Hinde (1979) and how this view is consistent with the action theory used throughout this book. We then consider how relationships change through expectancy violations, look at

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the associations between communication and relationship, describe how power resides in relationships, describe how actions within a transition project are often impacted by the relationship projects, and illustrate these processes through a case study.

During the transition to adulthood, familial and peer relationships change due to contextual factors such as youth leaving formalized schooling, beginning full-time work, or reaching the age of majority. The people around youth also experience changes. Parents are no longer legal guardians and may help their children leave home and develop projects enabling them to set up their own residences. Peer relationships may alter as young adults look toward establishing longer-term partnerships. Relationships also change because of what happens in them, that is, they are ongoing constructive processes and not expressions of given physical, personal, or social determinants. In other words, during the transition to adulthood relationships are uniquely influenced by, and include, constructive processes and contextual factors, but these relationships also share some characteristics with other interpersonal relationships. These characteristics are described in the next section. These descriptions cut across various types of personal relationships so that we establish the basis for understanding relationships broadly. However, we also consider some of the unique situations faced by those involved with someone in the process of entering adulthood.

Relationship

This chapter and two other chapters in this book describing specific types of relationships, Chapters 8 and 11, are concerned with personal relationships. Personal relationships are distinct from formal relationships. Hinde (1979) suggests that the distinction can be made on the basis of the knowledge the social partners have of one another. In formal relationships, the behaviors of the participants are linked to different values, goals, norms, rules, conventions, and purposes than it is the case in personal relationships. The membership in such a relationship is determined by positions or roles in the society. In formal relationships, the behaviors of the participants are determined by the positions or roles and the intended actions can be performed by or with any person entitled for this role in the society or social organization. Thus, the formal relationship comprises a series of individual and joint actions and projects; however, the relationship is tightly associated with the position or function in society or an organization (and not primarily to the person holding the position). The relationship thus can be transferred easily to another person obtaining this position. In contrast, personal relationships between two people who are known to each other are comprised of actions also over an extended period of time but are directed at the persons due to their personal identity. The relationship does not transfer easily to another person. The type of relationship goals, its participants, as well as the communication community connected with the relationship help distinguish formal and personal relationships.

To understand personal relationships, we turn to Robert Hinde's seminal work. Hinde (1979) describes a personal relationship as a series of interactions across time between two individuals who are known to each other; relationships involve behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects. Relationship is also when we know that this encounter is not the last one and that there are others to come, reflecting the participants' intentions. This description fits well with the action theory that provides the framework for this book, which sees actions as the integration of manifest actions, subjective and the social processes. We begin first with the behavioral aspects of relationships or actions.

The actions between people are the building blocks of personal relationships (Hinde, 1979, 1997; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Although relationships are comprised of series of actions between people, single actions between people are not relationships. If actions are unrelated to one another, the actions do not constitute a relationship (Hinde, 1979) or relationship project. Linked sets of actions between people over an extended period provide a history that, in turn, contributes toward the development of expectations for future interactions together (Hinde, 1997; Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987). The connection between action and relationship is revealed by the following youth, talking about the role of going out on dates (action) in maintaining the quality of the relationship that she has with her romantic partner:

> Oftentimes the relationship just gets thrown on the back burner. So, it was really nice when we started putting dates together. So we spend every Saturday together, which is really nice. . . . I always find whenever I'm starting to feel lukewarm about the relationship, as soon as I actually spend some quality time with it, it totally rekindles whatever we've had. Yeah, so that's nice.

It is evident from this young woman's description of her experience that action is distinct from the relationship itself, and yet the relationship is formed and maintained by the couple's actions. There are intentions for the next encounter as well as intentions reaching beyond it. Although we have quoted information from one person in the relationship, we may be able to suggest that this couple communicates about their relationship, not only about the next actions. They may construct a relationship as a topic and a process. They may somehow agree on the definition and understanding of the relationship, develop a set of actions that they usually perform and a set of rules which guide their joint and individual actions. They may adopt some norms addressing what is permissible and what not for them as a couple and as individuals. They may also develop joint ideas of which other projects are agreed upon, which are desirable, and which should or should not be pursued. These ideas can mirror the conventions, rules, and norms of their relationship but are not independent from social conventions, rules, and norms of other social processes and the particular society. Additionally, individuals come to expect their partners to act in a certain way because of past interactions. However, often partners substitute their knowledge of past interactions by their wishes and ideas about how they want this relationship to be and how they want their partner to behave. Over time, the accumulated sets of actions contribute to expectations that the *relationship* will

likely continue into the future. At that point, the relationship becomes the context for interactions (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997) or joint project.

In action-theoretical terms relationships (Young et al., 1996, 2002) we can view Hinde's (1979) notion of relationships as joint projects. They emerge from series of joint actions over time, which, in turn, contribute to partners anticipating future interactions (Hinde, 1979, 1997; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Joint projects are series of joint actions over a medium term (Young et al., 1996, 2002). Joint relationship projects may become career-like long-term processes. Careers are more complex and longer term than projects. They are more embedded in the societal and organizational forms and resources. An example of a relationship career is a long-term friendship in which partners invest considerable time and energy toward maintaining and revitalizing across several decades. Relationships between parents and their young adult children may also transform into careers. For example, a mother and a daughter (aged 17 years) spent time together planning volunteer activities, going for walks, and cooking together. The mother and daughter were promoting the daughter's transition from high school to university and growing independence in daily tasks, however, these transitions to adulthood processes were secondary to the relationship project. The relationship superseded the transition project and appeared to be developing as part of a career for this mother and daughter.

Expectations and Expectation Violations

The development of expectations for the future of relationships and relationship partners points to one of the many ways that cognitions and affect are aspects of relationships. Hinde (1979) notes that people in a relationship do not act toward each other on the basis of current or present perceptions. They act in the present in accordance with what is expected next (next moment, next week, next year) in interactions and what they assume is the goal of relationship. These expectations are built upon the history of interactions in this relationship as well as in other relationships and upon the desired aims of the relationship. This means that action and projects have a feed forward as well as a feedback dimension. Additionally, actions are goal-directed and intentional. A goal is an expected, anticipated, or desired state or a process at the end of an action. Thus, expectations in a relationship are linked to the goal systems of the participants as well as of the couple in relationship. This important extension of the expectation concept suggests that relationships are not repetitions of the past events.

Expectations that partners will act in a certain way and that the relationship will continue in the future are not always met (e.g., Collins & Luebker, 1994). That is, partners sometimes act in ways that are incongruent with past experiences and present expectations. This is particularly evident during periods of rapid change of one or both partners (Collins, 1997). Building on Hinde's model, Collins (1995,

1997) suggested that expectancy violations could lead to realignment of the relationship. The violation could be of a convention of a particular relationship convention (e.g., "what we usually do or not do"), rules (e.g., "what is or is not desirable"), or norms (e.g., "what is or is not forbidden and what is negatively sanctioned"). The experience of an expectancy violation elicits cognitions and emotions (e.g., surprise, anger, anxiety) which then steer one or both partners toward altering expectations or changing behaviors. It also can elicit changes in the climate of the relationship, which then leads the couple to change goals, behavior, or some other standards of the relationship. Expectancy violations are not necessarily negative experiences, nor do they necessarily generate conflict. Individuals may violate expectations by engaging in neutral or positive behaviors or actions (Collins, 1997). Realignment of cognitions or behaviors diminishes the incongruence between partners and the anxiety provoked by the expectancy violation. Realignment also contributes toward maintaining the relationship because it allows for transformation (Collins, 1995, 1997). Although not part of the model proposed by Collins, it is reasonable to suggest that expectancy violations that cannot be accommodated will contribute to deterioration of the relationship, particularly if the expectancy violations stem from behavior that is experienced in a negative way.

For example, difficulty in accommodating expectations was evident in one couple participating in a study of joint action in youths' romantic relationships. This couple, undergraduate students in a serious dating relationship, was engaged in a project to "balanc[e] aspirations for a life together with making progress in our education and careers." Despite efforts to find a workable balance, the couple split up in the middle of their research involvement, at least in part because they were unable to reconcile the young man's expectations for a family and having children in the near future with the young woman's desire to pursue advanced education. In this case, failure to accommodate to the differing expectations, developing a mid-term and long-term joint goal, attending to individual goals, and accompanying actions (e.g., choosing to prioritize schoolwork over spending time with the other member of the couple) resulted not only in a deterioration of the relationship, but also to its termination.

Relationship and Context

Relationships are not series of joint actions isolated from the surrounding social context or culture. In Chapter 10 we describe culture as "a field of action" (Boesch, 1991, p. 29). This field of action is inducing and controlling joint actions, and is continuously changed by the actions of the field. This field of action co-constructs with relationship partners, the criteria, and other parameters for relationships. Criteria include the eligibility for relationships, the beginning, course, and ending among many other features of relationship actions, projects, and careers. Criteria include the ease with which relationships can be dissolved. Across cultures, we find that some relationships are more readily dissolved than others. Those that

are pressed to be maintained by the culture and relationship partners are closed relationships. Closed relationships are those for which eligibility is not achieved but ascribed, and thus the entry in such a relationship is partly non-voluntary (Berscheid, 1986; Murstein, 1970). Such relationships are generally quite stable (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997) for several reasons. It could be because their dissolving could be tied to a negative social sanction or because there is a strong emotional involvement based on childhood experiences. Examples of closed relationships are parent–child, conjugal, or sibling relationships. The criteria for these relationships are bound in cultural artifacts such as kinship norms and laws (Laursen & Collins, 1994), and therefore are more often maintained by the social partners and through constraints imposed by the surrounding social context. Open relationships are voluntary and are formed, and transformed with much more flexibility than closed relationships (Laursen & Collins, 1994; Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999). Friendships or early romantic relationships are examples of open relationships. However, with time and investment, friendship or romantic partners and the people around them may tend to view the friendship or romantic relationship as closed and even go so far as to declare it closed through public signals (e.g., marriage) (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999). Declaration of a relationship as closed is a signal that the partners are intentionally jointly acting in a way that will make the relationship endure over a long period of time. Such a declaration is an outward sign of an exclusive joint relationship project or career.

Communication

A fundamental process in relationships is communication. Relationships cannot occur without communication. However, relationships and communication are not synonymous. We show this by distinguishing how communication and relationship intersect.

Communication is the means by which people construct and maintain their relationships (Baxter, 2004; Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006). Although we describe relationships as involving intentional goal-directed series of actions between two people, communication is more than goal-directed messages constructed for the purposes of achieving goals (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). This is because communication is constitutive (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Mead, 1934; Pearce, 1989). That is, communication defines and constructs personal relationships and the individuals in the relationships. For example, a mother and a son discuss how to rearrange and clean some living space in the house. The following excerpt from their conversation illustrates how the topic of cleaning a room is the construction of relationship boundaries.

Parent: Did you try my plan of recycle, give away?
Youth: No I didn't.
Parent: Do you see that could work?

Youth: Yeah it could.
Parent: I would like that room to be empty to the point where Melinda could clean it tomorrow. Is that feasible? If I went and helped you today. . .
Youth: No. No, you're not gonna come and help me because when you help me, you sit down and you point to stuff and say, put that away, put that away.
Parent: What if I helped. . .
Youth: And to be perfectly frank, it's irritating.

This mother and son not only are negotiating boundaries, but they are also constructing who each person is becoming through their dialogue. In this case, the mother feels she is trying to "give him some respect for being an adult" and, in doing so, positions herself to become a mother of an adult son who knows how to be responsible for physical space in the home. However, just as the mother is trying to help her son be more independent, she is proposing a joint action that the son experiences as independence threatening. So she is saying one thing and doing the exact opposite. Nonetheless, this strategy is functional in some way. The son is able to resist his mother's action and thus assert his independence. He attempts to portray himself as an adult and, through his communication, make himself an equal partner with his mother. The mother and son would not be becoming who they are if they were not engaged in this type of joint action together or if they were to have a conversation with other people. The two are shaped and being shaped by the way they present themselves to each other as well as their shared communication process.

Over time, relationship partners create a set of communication practices which create what some researchers call a relational culture (Burleson et al., 2000). This relational culture is in line with our description of culture in Chapter 10. Relationship partners are, over time, creating and being transformed by their communication practices and actions. In due course, relationships emerge as unique and non-predictable (Lollis, 2003). They are less causal and more of an intentional and emergent process. But relationships are not so unique that they are incomprehensible to others. Relationship partners draw their communication practices from the larger culture in which they are embedded but their joint actions create variations that are unique to the dyad (Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006). For example, joint actions contributing to the creation of unique communication include the construction of special vocabularies that symbolize the relationship (Baxter, 1987).

As we have already noted, communication contributes to and it is important to the construction of the relationship, but we cannot assume that it is the same as the relationship. Even when relationship partners are not meeting or communicating, they are involved in constructing meaning for the relationship through reflexive processes. For example, relationship partners may separately think about their relationship using processes (e.g., thinking about alternative relationships, satisfaction with the relationship) that either reinforce or diminish their commitment to the relationship.

Power

The transition to adulthood has often been associated with transformations in the parent–child relationship from a generally vertical power relationship to a more equitable or horizontal arrangement (Russell, Pettit, & Mize, 1998). What does the change in power relations mean during the transition to adulthood? To understand this change in power relations, it is critical to first outline what we mean by power.

Power is often considered to be a resource that resides within a person (for example, the classic description by French & Raven, 1959). But individuals do not have power just because they have resources – there has to be someone to have power "over". For this reason, Emerson (1962) suggested that "power is a property of the social relation; it is not an attribute of the actor." (p. 32). He also proposed that dependence of one person provides the basis for the other person's power. For example, if a youth depends on a parent for financial resources, the parent has some power over the youth. But that same parent likely depends on the youth for love and fulfillment of the parent–child relationship which provides the youth with some power as well (Kuczynski, 2003). Both partners have power in the relationship because they are mutually dependent upon one another. Drawn from Young and colleagues' (2006) transition to adulthood study, the following sequence of conversation involves a mother who is trying to convince her daughter of the need to be responsible with money when the daughter leaves for university. This conversation illustrates the way that resources and withdrawal of love can be used to exert power in the relationship:

Parent: And, I think it's better to figure out exactly how much money you'll need per month. Like, who, and who's gonna pay for your flights to come back, and when are you gonna come back [cut off]
Youth: Well, if you wanna see me, then I'll come back. If you don't, then I'll stay there.
Parent: Well [cut off]
Youth: So if you want me to come, you can pay for it. If you don't [cut off]
Parent: Yeah, I know.
Youth: Want me to come, then I'll stay there, I don't care. I'm not flying myself home. I'll just stay there the whole time. I really don't care.

From an action-theoretical perspective, power dynamics are observed by considering the goals for actions. Goals which are founded upon dependence on another person will reveal power dynamics. For example, a parent's support of his or her child to gain employment might be founded upon a goal of feeling successful as a parent. The youth has power over the parent because the parent is dependent upon the youth gaining a feeling of success.

So why do power arrangements in parent–child relationships change during youths' transition to adulthood? Youths' resources change. Over time, they are able

to supply their own needs in certain areas of their lives. This means that youths depend on their parents for reasons that are distinct from prior periods of their lives. One example is in the area of finances, where the dependency often shifts from one where a child expects the parent to provide not only for their food and shelter but also for toys and entertainment, to one where a young adult is employed but continues to require an adult with an established credit history to act as a cosigner for things such as student and car loans, and renting an apartment. Although parents retain some power, for example, having the ability to refuse to cosign for a loan, and remain responsible should the youth default on their loan, the parents' ability to dictate what apartment, or vehicle or educational path the youth should pursue is diminished by the youth's independent source of income. Power relationships also change as youths develop satisfactory bounded, reliable, and secure sense of themselves, and can cope with patronizing suggestions without feeling hurt and threatened.

Power relations and the link between power and dependency are evident in other kinds of relationships during the transition to adulthood. The experience of one young adult dating couple in a post-secondary education program illustrates this sense of powerlessness due to dependency on the partner within the context of a romantic relationship, wishing, at the same time, to be independent. This couple had begun discussing future plans for marriage and careers, but the woman felt as if she could not proceed with considering her future work or need to contribute to the household income until the man's plans became more firmly established. She felt frustrated and somewhat helpless because of this,

> We'd always talked about, as soon as you finish school, go back to . . . to work, but I . . . don't really know what he planned on working as. Whether he's just gonna continue being a landscaper like he's done all these years . . . or would he want to get started in his career as a film-maker.

Her sense of powerlessness and frustration were exacerbated by their different attitudes toward employment:

> He's like very particular about what he likes, and what he doesn't like, and . . . you know. If, there's a job, you know, it's like, there's an easy job, but he, he won't do it just because it's easy money, it's like, you know, he thinks it, through and it has to match with like his values and stuff, and I'm not [like that]. Pretty much, like, if there was a job that, I wasn't really interested, like, you know, I don't know like, cleaning bathrooms and it paid well, I would take it. But he wouldn't.

Thus, power is situated in the dependence of partners on each other. In romantic partnerships and friendships, power is not being transformed as it is expected in parent–child relationships during the transition to adulthood. Nonetheless, the same dynamics and principles hold across relationships with power situated in the relationship rather than within individuals.

Case Example

Amelia, a single mother working as a hairdresser, lived with her son, Jordon. Jordon was in his last year of high school. When he is not in school, Jordon works for his father's business. Jordon has older siblings who are now living on their own. Jordon is the last child to enter adulthood.

In the spring of Jordon's last year of high school, Amelia and Jordon talked about what might happen in the following year. They were engaged in a joint educational/career development project. Conversations related to the project were respectful and infused with humor. They spoke to one another with ease while addressing important issues related to Jordon's educational options for the following year. Amelia believed it was important to provide Jordon with the security of living at home while he attended college. She said, "It will be easier for him if he finishes his education and has a profession before moving out of the house." In addition, Amelia wanted Jordon to focus more on his studies because "being out there without education will be harder for him." Jordon wanted to finish high school but was not entirely sure of the next step in his path toward gaining higher education.

By late spring, Amelia took on a second job to help pay off her debts. The second job, working in retail, was in the evening hours so she was rarely at home. Jordon, a very sociable person, felt lonely and wanted people around to talk to. He felt lonely and angry because there was nothing to do at home. Rather than spending most evenings home alone, Jordon moved to his father's home. The change in work schedules and residential arrangements limited the number of opportunities for conversations between Amelia and Jordon.

The limited interactions bothered Amelia because the ability to talk with Jordon also meant she held some influence. She particularly wanted to influence Jordon's decisions about education and career. Jordon, although wanting his mother's support, found that not having his mother around meant that he had learned how to be more independent at an important time in his life. He began to feel solely responsible for finishing the current phase of his schooling rather than relying on his mother pushing him to work hard. But Jordon failed some courses in his final year of high school. This meant that all of Amelia's plans for Jordon to gain more education while living at home were put on hold.

Jordon's failure at school was met with Amelia initiating discussions about education, "Okay . . . we have to talk about your education – what you're doing now in your schooling – how you're doing – what your plans are – because this is your last year in the school – the high school – so I want to know – if you're [unclear] at the end of the year what your plans are. . ." But Jordon felt frustration because he felt his mother was asking him for information that she already had. He began to use sarcasm or change the topic to avoid engaging with his mother. Amelia felt that her expressions of worries and fears about her son's future were expressions of concern that would help her regain the closeness they once had.

Over the summer and fall months, Jordon and Amelia attended mass together on Sundays and occasionally talked on the telephone. Increasingly, however, Jordon felt irritated by his mother's efforts to guide him. Amelia worried for Jordon's

well-being, "Like he's – he's avoiding to talk about how he's doing – I doubt it that he's doing good … his body language – and he's not – speaking like … he doesn't look at me … and he tried to avoid … it's a sign that he's not doing that well in school – so I'm kind of sad there … because he's pretending that he's doing well."

The change in the frequency of contact between Amelia and Jordon did not provide the impetus for the deterioration of their relationship. Although joint actions are the foundation of relationships, by the time parents and children have lived together for almost two decades, they have established a long history of joint actions. Reducing the number of joint actions will not, by itself, generate tension in the relationship. However, there was incongruence in expectations and strategies to develop their relationship. Jordon expected his mother to be around the home and support him. When she went to work at night, Jordon became lonely, felt deprived of the traditional way their relationship functioned. Thus, he elected to live at his father's house where he could join in family interactions. Amelia did not expect Jordon to live elsewhere because he had previously only lived with her. Amelia also felt she lost influence because Jordon's father had more frequent opportunities for input regarding school and work. The changes in Amelia and Jordon's daily lives were not congruent with their expectations of and goals for one another. The difficulty in adjusting to the changes, and resetting new expectations and goals as well as the appropriate strategies to achieve them, may have contributed to the deteriorating quality of interactions. Jordon wanted to take responsibility for his life and no longer wanted his mother's input. Amelia wanted to influence Jordon's future because, like many parents, she wanted him to be financial secure during his adult life. She may have underestimated the role of emotional support. Jordon's power, in this case, was Amelia's desire to be influential. Amelia had diminished power in the relationship because Jordon had found more opportunities for social contact at his father's house and was receiving social support from his girlfriend.

Although both wanted a positive future for Jordon's educational/career development project, they each began to have different expectations about steering and controlling the project. They also began to find that their expectations of one another were incongruent with current actions. There was little accommodation of emerging differences in expectations of the relationship or the differences in expectations of the ongoing educational/career development project. They were unable to interpret and understand each other goals. Without adjustment to each other, the relationship was deteriorating. Interestingly, Amelia and Jordon did not change the focus of their joint project to a relationship project. Rather, the joint educational/career development project carried on but with difficulty because of the conflict in the relationship.

Conclusion

In summary, Hinde's (1979, 1997) description of relationships maps well onto the action-theoretical perspective (Young et al., 1996, 2002) that informs the foundation

of this book. Relationships are sets of joint goal-directed actions over a period of time between people who are known to each other and connected by joint goals. Past interactions and the anticipated future states and processes, that is, goals, inform what happens in the present. In the present, internal processes (expectations) steer actions.

Discrepancies between expectancies and present experiences contribute to realignment of cognitions and behaviors, which accommodate transformation and preservation of the relationship; expectancy violations that cannot be accommodated may contribute to the deterioration of the relationship. During counseling with youth (and their relational partners if available), it may be useful to use self-confrontation procedures (see Chapter 15) to gain insight into expectancy violations. It is in the discrepancy between current actions and expectations that violations emerge. Self-confrontation procedures may also support clients' transformation of expectations and goals and, in turn, the preservation of the relationship. It enables the partners to explain their own expectations, goals, feelings, and any other cognitions and emotions which occur during a relationship action and of which they may not be fully conscious. The networks of projects we all engage in and their connections to specific actions are complex. We also are not fully aware of them. Clarifying what we want and trying to reduce the number of projects the action serves is often helpful, as mindfulness interventions teach us. Thinking about the goals, in regard to external and internal end states and processes of the other person is a very helpful tool for developing, maintaining, or transforming a relationship.

Partners and the social context in which the relationship is embedded endow meanings on the relationship. Meanings include how easily the relationship may be dissolved. People are loath to leave closed field relationships due to the social pressures and norms to refrain from ending the relationships, as relationship are not only personal but also social ventures. As such, these relationships may supersede other projects such as career development projects. Youth and their relationship partners may temporarily or permanently abandon some projects in order to focus on and preserve their relationship. Once the relationship project is stabilized, youth and their partners may attend to other projects.

Relationships may be the means by which other projects are pursued such as career or work (see Chapter 8). Thus, the maintenance of the relationship project is important for the pursuit of other projects. But other projects may also be the way in which relational partners are engaged together. Take, for example, a parent and youth who worked for several months together investigating various universities for the purposes of selecting a career path for the youth. The project of selecting a career path was facilitated by a relationship characterized by good relationship skills and communication. But the relationship was also enhanced by the joint pursuit of a long-term goal. That is, the parent and youth enjoyed investigating university programs and visiting campuses together. The joint actions related to the career development project were rooted in the relationship but also part of the relationship project. There is a synergistic association between relationship projects and other projects. Mindful attention to the intersections between relationship projects and

other projects during counseling will assist in understanding the goals and actions of youth and their relational partners.

Power, from an action theory approach, does not reside within a person but within relationships. Helping clients understand how power resides in relationships rather than in another person may help them navigate frustrating impasses. Here, again, self-confrontation procedures may be useful for observing what clients "want" from their partners during communicative acts. Understanding what they want from each other will help illuminate power struggles which can then be addressed in counseling.

Personal relationships are central to human life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis et al., 2000) and therefore the transition to adulthood. Relationship projects are more often super-ordinate in relation to other projects, particularly those with parents or intimate partners. Thus, counseling with clients who are entering adulthood will likely involve work on, or about, relationships, as the transition to adulthood is a joint process.

Chapter 6
Emotion and the Transition to Adulthood

Emotions and emotional processes play an integral part in the transition to adulthood. Jointly creating, constructing, and negotiating the transition to adulthood includes many emotionally laden challenges as well as positive experiences such as making and carrying out decisions about education and managing work responsibilities, finances, living arrangements, and new relationships. It is widely recognized that the transition to adulthood is a difficult but also an exciting and enriching period for both youth and their parents (Arnett, 2004). A more complex and integrative understanding of how emotions are embedded and constructed within relationships, which are part of the joint engagement in and construction of transition, will improve how counseling professionals effectively incorporate emotion in the support and treatment of parents and youths (Greenberg, 2002; Young, Paseluikho, et al., 1997). The purpose of this chapter is to describe the role of emotion in transition to adulthood from an action-theoretical perspective and to draw implications for counseling interventions for both youth and their parents.

The conceptualization of emotion has a complex and complicated history. It has been separated from other processes that are considered more cognitive. Lazarus (1984) considered it in a cognitive way before it was described in an integrative manner. It has been thought of as a physiological process, a mediating process, as well as a constructive process (Averill, 1985). Neurological research indicates that emotional processes can be linked to several regions of the brain, including the amygdala, and prefrontal cortex regions (Barrett, 2006). Emotions, affects, and feelings are mostly active and required for the immediate holistic monitoring of current situations. However, they are equally related to mid-term projects and long-term career as these are materialized and embodied in actions, on the one hand, and can generate long-term emotional anticipation, on the other. Emotions are sometimes seen as bottom up steering processes, but are also described as regulation processes in a top–down steering of action and, finally, are considered as top–down steering on their own. Emotions can also be considered as goals of actions. Striving for happiness has been signified as one of the most respectable goals, as indicated in the constitution of the United States. Emotion is regarded as being able to facilitate or inhibit our success in actions and life in general, our relationships, and our health.

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Emotion has been defined as a physiological process that orients people to important cues and helps prepare individuals for adaptive responses to their environment (Johnson, 2008, p. 274). Johnson (2008) goes on to describe how emotion consists of a rapid perception that something is important, followed by a bodily response, an effort to understand the meaning of the cue, and a move into action. Emotions have been considered as mediators, causes, and effects of psychological processes such as attention, memory, and perception (Barrett, 2006). Emotion research has focused on identification and measurement and has been guided by the scientific values of rationality, logical thinking, and numerical measurements. More recent advances have promoted multilevel theories attempting to integrate a variety of different emotion-generation processes (Greenberg, 2007). The role of thoughts and feelings in relation to longer-term patterns of interpersonal communication has received less attention in emotion research (Young et al., 1997). Emotion is embedded, constructed, and regulated within relationships, which are dynamic, and constantly evolving and changing. We acknowledge the natural science perspective but move to a social constructionist epistemology that foregrounds understanding how emotion is socially constructed, as indicated by Averill (1985), and adapted to within relationships.

This chapter offers an action-theoretical perspective on the role that emotion plays in the transition to adulthood. Implications for counseling interventions are presented and explained. The chapter is organized around an in-depth case study of a mother, Linda, and her daughter, Suzanne, who identified themselves as being in close relationship while generating and going through a transition-to-adulthood project. Implications for counseling treatment are drawn both from the dynamics identified for this particular dyad and also implicitly reference a larger study that examined 20 parent–youth relationships over the course of approximately 8 months as they transitioned to adulthood (Young et al., 2008).

Emotion as Contributing to the Transition Project

The predominant study of emotion continues to focus on individual experiencing and individual representation of emotions (Barrett, 2006). Historically, emotion research conceptualized emotions as disruptive and needing to be controlled. More recently, emotion research has focused on the integration and transformation of emotion with the broad goal of living more functionally (Greenberg, 2002, 2004). Young and colleagues (1997) described the role that emotions have in individuals' internal processes and in the formulation of needs, plans, goals, and purposes. They argue that emotion energizes action. These authors have presented an intriguing view of emotions as relational action tendencies. As action tendencies, they serve to establish, maintain, or disrupt relationship with the environment in the form of readiness for purposeful action. It is difficult to specify the nature of an emotion's action tendency without referring to the context within which the emotion is taking place. An action-theoretical view of emotion presupposes the inherent value of the

subjective understanding of interpersonal events, including the construal of intentions implicit in action. From this lens, emotion generates important information about the meaning of events and can serve to energize both individual and joint behaviors in adaptive ways (Greenberg, 2007).

Previous research has established that the transition to adulthood occurs within important relationships including the relationship that youths have with one or both primary caregivers (Young et al., 1999; Young, Valach, et al. 2001). When considering parent–youth dyads, it is reasonable to expect that both parents and youths have at least some ideas, hopes, and plans, but also fears, for both the processes and the outcomes that make up the transition to adulthood. If the individually held goals or steps regarding transition are not regularly discussed or agreed upon, and if the degree of parental involvement is not established, there exists a potential for conflict in the relationship. Over long periods, unaddressed patterns of conflict have the potential to lead to emotional disturbance, disrupting the transition process on both relational and functional levels. The specific encounter between parents and adolescents will likely be accompanied by negative emotions.

Emotional Disturbance

Recently, Wagner and Davis (2006) described the findings of their research on the impact of emotional disturbance (ED), identified as emotional disruption to the point that a student's daily functioning is disabled, on the transition to adulthood. They described that ED led to a pattern of disconnectedness from school, academic failure, poor social adjustment, and criminal justice system involvement. Similar negative outcomes for youth with ED have been echoed in other concurrent longitudinal research projects related to school and mental health settings (e.g., Davis & Vander Stoep, 1997) and in youth with psychiatric disorders living in community settings (Vander Stoep et al., 2000). Wagner and Davis (2006) concluded that programs designed to improve emotional capacities need to involve youth in meaningful relationships and to pay attention to the whole person. They went on to describe the practicalities of a holistic approach including involvement of students and families in goal-driven transition (to adulthood) planning.

Previous research bringing an integrative theoretical lens on the transition to adulthood has identified and described how youth and parents are involved in goal-directed action processes (Young et al., 2001). This research described how the transition to adulthood takes place in the context of intentional joint actions, and thus goes well beyond the conceptualization of behavior steered by prescriptive rules. The negative impact of ED on the process of transitioning to adulthood would be minimized when goals and corresponding steps were made explicit and mutually agreed upon. Problematic or negative emotions, although conceptualized as residing within the individual person who is "suffering" with them, have an impact on the entire relational system. Youth and parents entering counseling have likely been impacted at the level of ED. Such emotional disturbance is not a one-off event, but

a part of ongoing joint processes of relationship and transition. Individuals or couples, such as parents and youth, may engage in joint processes that have emotional consequences not only for the moment and for that issue but for other issues and for longer periods of time. Emotional disturbance can impact a person's success in life. Thus, it becomes important that such experiences are studied thoroughly, as is the case with cognitive processes often studied under the label of intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence and Emotion Regulation

A positive or adaptive view of emotions and their role in human functioning has come from research into emotional intelligence (EI). EI refers to an individual's ability to monitor his/her own emotions and utilize this monitoring process in such a way that enhances social functioning. Most researchers agree that emotional awareness and management are the core factors of EI (Akerjordet & Severinsson, 2007). Goleman (1995) claimed that EI determines a person's potential for learning practical skills and is based on self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness in relationships. There are currently two common perspectives on EI that diverge as to whether it is an innate personality trait or acquired ability (Montgomery et al., 2008). Research into EI has been primarily grounded in positivistic frameworks and has only recently begun to examine how EI might be understood from/by socially oriented epistemologies (Akerjordet & Severinsson, 2007).

Several lines of research have examined the relationship between EI and the transition to adulthood. EI has been linked with transition to adulthood research as part of the transition to high school (Parker et al., 2004), transition to post secondary schooling, and as a component of career decision making (Brown, George-Curran, & Smith, 2003). Research focused on the academic success of youth found that overall EI was a significant predictor of academic success and of successful transition to post-secondary education (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). Another study (Lopes, Salovey, & Strauss, 2003) found that students with high-reported EI were more likely to report positive relations with others, rate high in perceived parental support and less likely to report negative interactions with friends. A further study found that high adaptability and stress management abilities characterized successful students (Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond, & Hogan, 2005). Each of these studies illustrated how the presence of EI, whether trait or skill, led to positive and functional adaptations to stimuli that evoked emotional response.

The ability to regulate emotions entails modulating emotional experience to attain desired affective states and adaptive outcomes (Lopes, Salovey, Cote, & Beers, 2005). Emotion regulation has been identified as one part of the larger construct of EI and an important part of emotional expression and resulting behavior. Emotion regulation operates through cognitive, expressive, behavioral, and physiological processes, and has a significant impact on the quality of social interactions. It occurs on both an intrapersonal and an interpersonal level, and is significantly

impacted by the attributions made about intentionality or the reasons behind other's behavior. An important strategy for emotion regulation in the transition to adulthood occurs when parents foreground their youth's transition goals, putting less emotional energy into their own. Furthermore, parents who put more energy into relationship-oriented goals and functional steps put themselves in the place of acting as emotional resources for the youth.

Parental Influence on Transition Processes

As identified, the parent–youth relationship has a significant impact on the transition to adulthood. This becomes especially poignant when considering the complexity of development into an adult identity and the development of meaningful vocation or career (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Li & Kerpelman, 2007; Young et al., 1997, 2008). Navigating the transition to adulthood includes renegotiating and transforming primary relationships while making choices about education, work and career, and peer group and associated lifestyle (Berman & Sperling, 1991; Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Brown et al., 2003; Li & Kerpelman, 2007). When youths receive feedback from parents about their future goals and aspirations, these views have the potential to strengthen or weaken adolescents' view of themselves in the future (Li & Kerpelman, 2007). Li and Kerpelman (2007) identified that the level of emotional connection to parents impacted the degree of emotional upset experienced when parent and youth perspectives about future goals differed. Emotional connection mitigated the emotional upset over disagreement related to life goals. This dynamic, identified by the authors as identity disruption, was impacted by physical proximity with greater physical distance decreasing the negative impact of disagreement. They went on to suggest that a central task for youths might be to develop the ability to separate one's own feelings from one's parents and the ability to express disagreements. Emotional separation does not equate with discrete individuation (Young et al., 2008) but refers to the important ability of appropriately distinguishing between one's own and one's parent's transition-related goals, plans, and emotions.

Action Theory and Emotion

From the lens of Contextual Action Theory (Valach, Young, et al., 2002), emotion has been conceptualized to play an important role in goal-directed action for a variety of functional processes, behavioral regulation, and the construction of social meaning. More specifically, emotion energizes, monitors, and steers the goal-directed processes of actions and projects. Wanting to be happy, content, satisfied, or proud within an action, project, and career, and striving toward these emotions are common and expected in our culture. Integrating emotion-related action steps into goal-directed processes to address or generate desired emotion is also a general

practice. These could be positive or even negative, for example, some people believe that "one has to suffer before enjoying the satisfaction of achievement."

Regulating emotion within an action is often addressed in psychological research. In some cases, there is an underlying assumption that emotion occurs in an automatic way and that we can only regulate emotions. However, regulation of emotion can be found as both occurring automatically and being socially constructed. Emotion can be monitored but it also energizes action. Being aware of one's own emotions is an important task in counseling or psychotherapy. Being able to nourish positive emotion is also a helpful skill. Emotion is an ever-present process within action: it is part of generating, maintaining, pursuing, changing, and realizing goals.

Often there are certain social conventions, rules, and norms about emotions in a particular setting or action. Equally, we learned that processing of certain goals and actions might be facilitated by certain emotions, while inhibited by others. Thus, as we sometimes steer our action to achieve certain emotions, emotions also can be facilitative in steering of our action. Emotional feedback and feed forward processes as well as emotional control are also important to consider. "I've got a good feeling about it" is an accepted exclamation about emotional control of an action. Emotion as instrumental in action regulation is also a widely experienced phenomenon. Actions in which we are not emotionally involved in a positive way might last longer, but we might be less persistent in carrying them out, we might invest less energy in them, we might omit certain movements and not generate the behavioral features that are associated with good executions of the action.

Emotions energize and de-energize action. As energy of/in action takes different forms, it is far from being just a physical term. This function can be followed at different levels of the action organization described above. We proposed that the involved processes are joint processes and also imply relationship processes. Thus, the description of the role of emotion in goal-directed action must be extended to the interactive process. To phrase it colloquially, "my action is impacting the others' emotion and action, and others' emotions are impacting my action and emotion." The joint equivalent of individual emotion is an important process to consider. The emotional climate of a parent and youth's encounter can be observed. It also is often addressed by the participants in the encounter itself or in the following self-confrontation interview. Understanding the impact of emotions on behavior has implications for more adequately achieving complex understandings of the transition to adulthood.

An action-theoretical view of parental influence is that it is guided by goals related to the transition to adulthood, as well as goals related to each parent's parenting project. Action theory argues that a more complete understanding of parental influence needs to move from a unidirectional view of the impact of parental action and instead toward an ongoing process view. It should account for the role of reciprocal information sharing and the ways in which construction and implementation of transition to adulthood goals are carried out within the parent–youth relationship.

Emotion as a Social Process

There are a number of perspectives that inform the literature on the role of emotion in the transition to adulthood, including those related to emotional disturbance, emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and contextual action theory. The communication and goal-directed behavioral processes and outcomes of the transition to adulthood are embedded within relationship and require ongoing negotiation and response. Because challenges are inherent within the complexities of transition to adulthood, it follows that emotions and emotion management play a central role in successful adaptive functioning. Emotions energize transition goals and ongoing communication processes. Emotional ambivalence can impact transition projects especially when goals and/or functional steps are not agreed upon within relational dyads, families, or other invested persons. Emotion regulation of both self and other also impact the degree to which goals are mutually constructed or whether the transition project is guided by only one person's goals. Within the transition project, positive emotions have been demonstrated to facilitate the process of governance transfer (Young et al., 2008). Unregulated negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and contempt, contribute to an unclear process of governance transfer and prevent the process of youth taking responsibility for the adult dimensions of his or her functioning.

The following case example represents a detailed examination of a mother–daughter relationship that, for the period of study, was characterized by a pattern of intense emotional interactions. From the larger study we found many parent–youth interactions included significant emotion especially when there was disagreement about either goals or functional steps related to the transition to adulthood. In the upcoming case example, emotional disturbance initially hindered and then eventually energized successful steps toward transition to adulthood goals that allowed for relationship contact to be maintained. The case study highlights how emotion impacts the transition process at the level of communication processes, thoughts, and feelings and how emotion plays a role at both the levels of transition goals and functioning steps. The role of emotion for three significant transition-related events is explored. Implications regarding the role that emotions play in transition projects come from both the case example and the larger study within which it was located (Young et al., 2008). The reader is reminded that the larger study on transition to adulthood utilized the qualitative action-project method which is a qualitative method used to study ongoing action processes within dyads. Fictitious names have been used in order to enhance the readability of the case example.

Case Example

Suzanne and her mother Linda report a close relationship that includes a high degree of conflict. Suzanne is a 19-year-old woman whose life is characterized by the specific task of transition into a nursing career and the more general process of becoming an independent adult with reduced reliance on parental support. Linda

identified herself as having been a nurse for several decades. She readily agreed with her daughter's goals of developing independence and also expressed doubt in her daughter's ability to succeed independently over the short term. Suzanne expressed frustration and anger at Linda's involvement in specific details of her life. At the same time, she undertook a pattern of regularly inviting her mother to help her with very specific details of the transition process including helping her deal with problems related to school and work pursuits. The following quote illustrates the complexity of Linda's concern at Suzanne's lack of capacity and Suzanne's frustration and anger at her perception of the mother's over-involvement.

Linda: Well you can't help but have a transition to adulthood. You're getting older, you're working on your career, you're . . . you know . . . you make decisions more independently of us now. You're not reliant on us to . . . [cut off]
Suzanne: I beg to differ.
Linda: Well, you are reliant. You're dependent on us, but you're able to make decisions without us having to cart you around everywhere.
Suzanne: You still get worried about me when I go out and not tell you.
Linda: Well, I think it's out of respect that we need to let each other know where we are, cuz we all live in the same house. Right?
Suzanne: Yeah, I'm going for a walk. Take the cellphone, take the cellphone (imitating her mother). Run after me like a crazy lunatic.

During the initial interview, Linda identified her perceptions about Suzanne's inability to manage her own mood and how this would negatively impact the transition to adulthood. The following exchange is a disagreement about the impact of the Suzanne's anxiety on her capacity to complete school tasks.

Linda: . . .is actually a really complicated process, because you have to . . . and then what people around you are expecting of you and . . . it's a real balancing act, cuz you need something that's not gonna be too stressful but stressful, you know, enough to keep you interested. And something that – a goal that you can realistically achieve. What we found out with Suzanne [speaking to researcher] is that it's not only, you know, how smart you are, but also temperament and – she has quite a high anxiety level around school and marks. She's quite a perfectionist and that has almost – well, we need to look at that when she's looking at what she can be, because although intelligence-wise she may be able to be more than a nurse, her anxiety . . . [cut off]
Suzanne: It has nothing to do with my anxiety.
Linda: Yeah it does.
Suzanne: No it doesn't. It has absolutely nothing to do with my anxiety. I hate doing projects and sitting down and studying. It's not anxiety.
Linda: (laughs) And mood components. You um. . .

Linda and Suzanne have both acknowledged Suzanne's anxiety although they disagree about its impact. Linda has conceptualized emotional disturbance plays a

role in the joint project and makes statements that indicate her goals for Suzanne related to choosing a temperament appropriate career path.

During the initial research interview, Linda described herself as acting as a stabilizing and rational voice for Suzanne, whom she considered a "free spirit." Linda also identified having to manage her own feelings of anxiety about finding the best way for her to be involved in Suzanne's transition.

Linda: So it's not really frustration. Not that she can't be frustrating. But I think it's more anxiety – what does she need and where's my role? How much do I get involved, how much do I step back? And she's just very fragile and so it's kind of this, um . . . finding the right, the right place to be of benefit to her.

Suzanne initially presented a clear idea of her career path and the kind of life she wanted to live as an adult. She explained how she arrived at her career choice in stating, "I just wanted to get something where I could make a decent living but then do my own thing on the side and there are some good options there." As part of the transition project, Suzanne held a goal of having her thoughts and feelings being taken seriously by her parents, specifically Linda.

Suzanne identified her goal for Linda's role in her transition to include helping with such practical matters as providing financial support and a place to live while she pursued her education. She reported feeling confident making major decisions on her own, without the assistance of her parents. This self-report contradicted the discussion and later actions that appeared to be related to the daughter experiencing intra and interpersonal anxiety related to transition tasks.

The Transition Project

The analysis process after the initial interview with Linda and Suzanne led to the tentatively worded transition project.

> Linda and Suzanne are working towards an increased level of independence for Suzanne through both arguing and actively negotiating, given their differences of opinion and strong personalities.

This joint project was meant as a goal-directed description of what Linda and Suzanne were doing together on an ongoing basis toward achieving the goals of transition to adulthood. This project was verified through discussion with the two women during the second research interview and was monitored throughout their involvement in the study. The following quote illustrates the relational dynamic of Linda and Suzanne working to uncover the meaning of the transition project and each of their roles in it.

Linda: All right. But this has nothing to do with your transition to adulthood.
Suzanne: Oh maybe you don't think that but maybe it actually does. Maybe it's showing how we communicate and that can show the transition phase . . . that seems logical . . . you know, I mean. The fact that we're always

arguing with each other might be a sign of my, of our independent personalities.

Linda: Well, of course we have independent personalities. I don't think we argue that much.

Suzanne: And the fact that we – the fact that I'm not a little kid anymore who listens to you "Do your homework." Yes Linda.

Linda: Suzanne, I've got news for you. You never did listen to me.

Parental Emotion Regulation

Linda attempted to adhere to one main strategy related to her goal of helping to prepare Suzanne for adulthood. The first strategy she used was to listen to and validate Suzanne's struggles, thus helping Suzanne manage the upsets she encountered in her daily life. She sometimes acted on the daughter's behalf such as the time she went with her to talk to her biology professor about a grade. In this action she appeared to function as an emotional resource for Suzanne, helping her calm her anxiety. Linda reported that although offering support and guidance was her intention, this strategy did not work due to the high degree of conflict that characterized her interactions with Suzanne. She identified that by the end of the project she had become more able to listen and respond to Suzanne's requests. She attributed this change to the fact that Suzanne had moved out of the family home.

Later in the study, as part of the self-confrontation interview, Linda identified the negative impact that attempting to support Suzanne had on her own emotions.

Linda: Well I'm trying to kind of . . . Acknowledge what Suzanne says and then move on with the conversation . . . it's either that or stand up and grab her around the neck and shake her (laughing). . .

Researcher: So a real challenge

Linda: Don't you dare (laughing)

Researcher: Contrasting emotions there for you? On one hand compassion on the other hand, kind of, frustration?

Linda: Well there was a lot of frustration and a lot of worry – a lot of concern . . . but again I have to . . . recognize that she's an adult. . .

Youth Emotion Regulation

Suzanne regularly took opportunity to assert her perspectives by direct confrontation. These actions were emotionally laden with anger, frustration, and determination. She identified that she had begun to establish her autonomy and individuality by openly stating her thoughts, ideas, and opinions, and by arguing with and yelling at her mother when necessary. She openly expressed differences of opinion with the mother, using humor and sometimes sarcasm to prove her point, asking and

answering questions, making suggestions, and providing explanations and examples to support her position. During the monitoring period, Suzanne reported that she had been able to reach a new level of independence, as well as a sense of peace, by making the decision move out of her parents' home and minimize contact with her mother, Linda, whom she perceived as trying to control her life.

From the location of her boyfriend's home, Suzanne continued to seek Linda's assistance in times of crisis and with practical matters; however, she resisted most of Linda's attempts to offer advice or to express her point of view, by either arguing or avoiding visits and not taking Linda's phone calls.

Joint Actions

The predominant mode of communication between Linda and Suzanne was argument, and both at times appeared frustrated with one another for expressing diverging points of view. Suzanne regularly appeared willing to engage in a certain level of conflict in the process of differentiating herself from her mother. As mentioned, Linda conceptualized absorbing her daughter's criticisms as an important task in her ongoing engagement with her daughter, trying to soften the blow of such interactions with humor and at other times reminding her daughter that she needed her to help her manage her emotions. The following example comes from Linda's journal about a particular interaction with Suzanne as she attempted to help her regulate Suzanne's emotions and simultaneously regulate her own emotions, attempting to stay within the role of parent.

> I was reading the newspaper when this activity happened. Suzanne talked to me about how impossible we are to live with and how she wants to move out. I want her to move out too when she acts like this. I hope she doesn't try to move out before getting her education (and possibly postpone her education). I felt exasperated. I was trying to listen to her vent her frustrations. My goal was to keep her focused on her needs to first get educated which gives her more of a means to move out. As a parent I try to keep her goal focused while listening to her vent her frustrations about her current situation in life. Suzanne talked about her relationship with her new boyfriend. I wanted to hear from her about her thoughts and feelings about this new relationship and also to give advice, insight and my thoughts re: relationships in general. I am feeling concern. I was trying to anticipate where she may need some information and directions and offer her some. This process was difficult as she would give brief responses and then very quickly end the conversation. I was able to give some of my thoughts and advice re: her current relationship which were broad enough areas that hopefully she can use the information for other times and things.

The following subsections identify key tasks encountered by this dyad pair and examine, from an action theory perspective, how they manage transition together highlighting the role that emotion plays in their interactions and the meaning they construct together of what they are doing.

Grades and the Nursing Program

Both Suzanne and Linda identified that the daughter's acceptance into the nursing program had not yet been confirmed as it was dependent on obtaining final grades for course work that had potentially been misplaced by the college. This was a source of anxiety for both Linda and Suzanne and appeared to precipitate argument. The mother identified this lack of clarity as a barrier to an important transition step. The conversation about this issue was characterized by a sense of frustration and a competition for responsibility and a plan to solve the problem.

Linda: All right. When are you expecting to hear from [college] about your starting date?
Suzanne: I have a starting date. It's March 31st.
Linda: For what? I'm talking about your nursing.
Suzanne: Oh nursing. I don't know. I haven't heard from them yet and they said they'd be getting back to me by the beginning of March. Well, it's the middle of March.
Linda: Oh really? By the beginning of March?
Suzanne: Yes.
Linda: Well phone them.
Suzanne: I don't know where the nursing program is though. Like, I don't know the number for the nursing program.
Linda: Well, we could probably look it up in the phone book or look in the internet or you could. . .
Suzanne: No I could go ask. I'm taking nursing classes.
Linda: Yeah. Well do that. You could also track down your missing marks.
Suzanne: Yeah, they're not gonna find it.
Linda: But they have to.
Suzanne: Yeah, well, they lost it.
Linda: You know what? Maybe we'll email Mr. [name of college instructor]
Suzanne: If they lost it, they have to give me an A.
Linda: Well, I say B because that's what you had on a part that we . . . [cut off]
Suzanne: I want an A.

Summer Jobs

Beyond the longer-term need to continue educational studies, Linda identified her desire for Suzanne to get a job during the summer before the following year of college studies. This process was also characterized by competition and frustration between Suzanne and Linda. The pair initially fought over the best way to plan how to choose summer work. Later in the summer, Suzanne relied heavily on Linda to find a job and then to address specific problems that arose as a result of her employment.

Linda: Let's talk about whether or not you're going to get a job this summer around . . . your schooling, right?
Suzanne: Well, I don't want to work in retail at all. I hate it.
Linda: How many courses do you have to take?
Suzanne: One.
Linda: One?
Suzanne: Well, I can't take two because the two classes I need – I was gonna take fall on the same time slot. They don't offer as many in the summer as they do normally.
Linda: How many days a week is that?
Suzanne: Three.
Linda: Three days a week? Maybe the other two you can go to the reptile refuge.
Suzanne: It's a volunteer job.
Linda: Yeah, I know. But at least, you know, it's something constructive.

Later on, Suzanne identified to her mother that she had already had a plan to find work on her own.

Suzanne: What if I wanna get a working job?
Linda: It would have to be a part-time job. I think a lot of jobs, you know, will expect a certain level of commitment. What kind of job could you. . .?
Suzanne: I don't know. I could work at the golf course.
Linda: Doing what?
Suzanne: I don't know. I haven't got – I haven't gone and asked what kind of jobs they have.
Linda: Well, how do you know that you can – why do you say the golf course then? Where'd you get the idea?
Linda: Okay. Well maybe you could start checking job sites on the internet and see what kind of student jobs are coming up this summer, knowing that you would only be doing it part time.
Suzanne: Well, a lot of people go to school full time and work full time, so. . .
Linda: Yeah, but I don't think you wanna do that.

Motorcycles and Independence

During the monitoring period of this dyad's involvement in the study both persons identified a source of frustration for them was Suzanne's goal of obtaining her motorcycle license and a motorcycle.

In a telephone call with the researcher, Suzanne identified the symbolic nature of the motorcycle for her in relation to her transition to adulthood.

Suzanne: My relationship with my mom is currently very crappy . . . all we do is yell at each other. We can't carry on a civilized conversation.

> The youth describes feeling lonely because she and mom don't connect on anything, and they do their own thing. The youth states that mom can't handle her because she has her own opinions that differ from mom's opinions.
>
> Later on in the conversation, the youth identified, "I was trying to get a motorcycle and more independence. I needed someone to cosign for me and she outright refused cause she doesn't want me having a motorcycle. She said she'll drive me around but she's not there or tired whenever I need a ride, and I can't afford a car. Also my boyfriend has been driving me around a lot. I was feeling pissed off. My goal was to gain riding independence. I was going to pay for it all myself. I just needed a co-signer. My mom being a bitch prevented me from reaching my goal. This incident relates to the transition project because I realize she will screw me every chance she has just to keep me under her control."

Suzanne described that a goal guiding her argumentative stance was to push mom away. She reported holding a belief that her mother was trying too hard to manage her life and that she believed her mother was having a hard time letting go.

Linda described a different perspective on Suzanne's goal for a motorcycle in this journal entry she completed as part of monitoring her own actions during the monitoring period.

> Suzanne phoned me at home and I answered it when I was unloading the dishwasher. She said that she thought she needed a cosigner to borrow the money for the motorcycle and wanted me to do it. I was thinking that she needed to sort this out for herself and that I would be crazy to cosign. I am so glad they have asked for a cosigner. Hopefully this puts an end to her crazy idea. A reprieve. During this conversation I tried to give firm and consistent responses. Trying to set boundaries as to how much (or little) we are going to help her as she transitions to adulthood.

Moving Toward Marriage

During the monitoring period, Suzanne made a significant life step of moving out of the family home and into a dwelling with her boyfriend. As part of this process, Suzanne had accepted her boyfriend's proposal of marriage. Both Suzanne and her mother separately identified that this led to significant emotional relief. Linda reported the internal conflict of welcoming the Suzanne's transition, resenting that Suzanne still found ways to remain unnecessarily dependent on her and at the same time feeling happy to support Suzanne making positive steps in her life. Linda identified internal conflict of wanting to support her daughter at the same time not being in support of her daughter's choice in life-partner. Linda described resolving her own ambivalence about this by finding a way to state her concerns to her daughter and after doing this then deciding to accept her daughter's chosen path and offer support. The following quote illustrates how Linda's thoughts and feelings energized her to share her perspective with Suzanne.

Linda: It gets so complicated with upbringing and values and experiences and whatnot. I see it as a really difficult situation as Suzanne is 20 and her boyfriend is 37 . . . she's moved in and she says they're getting married and they're going full bore ahead. He should be supporting her – I shouldn't be

> supporting her . . . although I don't mind doing it . . . how is she going to learn? . . . She thinks you know that he knows everything and he's going to be making all this money . . . I told her a couple of weeks ago that he was not the right person for her to marry . . . then you know I had to spend (laughing) two and a half hours in hell . . . as your mother I have an obligation to say that . . . I realize that you are an adult and we're allowed to have differences of opinion . . . but you know I do care about her and these are my concerns and . . . then of course you know . . . over the years how many parents have not been happy about their kids getting married – my mom wasn't happy when I married my husband and I can see what her concerns were. . .

Discussion

By the end of their involvement in the project, both Suzanne and Linda identified that the initially identified transition project had changed. They described how their interactions had become increasingly intense until Suzanne had decided to move out and live with her boyfriend. Suzanne described that the only way to ensure her independence was to drastically reduce the frequency of contact with her mother. Linda agreed that because her daughter was now currently living with her boyfriend, she was less in need of daily support. Both persons identified a cautious sense of relief and a renewed degree of energy to relate to each other. However, both Linda and Suzanne agreed that their old dynamics of negotiating and arguing about issues like finances had resurfaced. Suzanne still hoped for her mother to endorse her views and to remain involved on Suzanne's terms.

Linda appeared to perceive this project to be about how best to equip and support Suzanne to stick with and complete her schooling and to transition out of the family home. She reported finding the overall transition project to be frustrating and upsetting as her interactions were guided by her belief that Suzanne needed significant support due to her experiencing significant anxiety. At times, it appeared that this knowledge slowed Linda from standing by and letting the daughter address her own problems of living.

Suzanne's perception of the transition project involved two dimensions. She reported that the emotional impact of ongoing fights with her mother energized her plan to leave the family home earlier than originally intended. Second, Suzanne conceptualized the transition process in terms of what she was doing on her own to pursue her educational and career goals. Because of the intensity of conflict and hostility in their interactions, of utmost importance to the youth was the physical and emotional separation from the mother. This involved extricating herself from her mother's alleged attempts to control her life and trying to get her to understand the importance of "cutting the apron strings," a process that took place primarily by means of conflict and argument, with the youth reporting this as the only approach

that worked in getting her mother to listen to her. The following interchange took place within the research interview prior to the final joint conversation.

Research Interviewer:	What has been the impact of you moving out of the house Suzanne?
Suzanne:	I don't know
Mother:	Well you must see it some way – what do you mean I don't know . . . that's not an answer. . .
Suzanne:	Well I see it as a step towards being . . . more grownup I guess . . . I mean freer. . .

Emotion, Relationship, and the Transition Project

Most parents and youths tend to agree that the overarching framework or guiding goals for the transition to adulthood relate to the youth entering the adult world; living on his or her own, developing a career or finding meaningful work, working toward financial independence and taking over governance or responsibility for the domains of functioning that define these tasks (Young et al., 2008). The transition process is not typically without challenge or conflict, and these difficulties can occur within the goals that make up the project, at functional steps or shared strategies that function in service of goals.

As has been demonstrated, poorly regulated emotion can negatively impact the parent's and youth's ability to maintain relationship closeness. Developing the capacity or skill to adapt to intense emotional experience requires awareness of the other's intentions and skills of emotional awareness and self-regulation. Previous research has established that the parent–youth relationship acts both as a context for the transition process and as a resource that youth can draw on for support (Young et al., 2001). This support includes developing and maintaining a facilitative emotional climate in their joint encounters, in their relationship, and in the emotional well-being of the persons themselves. Three processes are relevant to achieving these outcomes. First, steering and directing an action toward a positive emotion, that is, initiating action with positive emotion as a goal, should occur. This is referred to as feed forward. Second, it is important that feedback on emotions is provided and negative emotions are attended to and neutralized or changed. Finally, in regulating emotions, behavioral features can be used to generate positive emotions and neutralize or change negative ones. For example, a tone of voice, a gesture, a look, a smile, or hearty laughter – all are powerful tools in facilitating these processes.

All of this points to the importance of monitoring emotions in action effectively. This monitoring of emotions in action is often forgotten when concentrating on the topic of the discussion, as was sometimes the case in Linda and Suzanne's dialogue. The emotion occurring in their conversation was not well monitored. In some of their conversations, negative emotion energized their joint action. Obviously, optimal development would be other way around: energizing toward positive emotions, de-energizing actions motivated by negative emotions.

As a feed forward process, action is steered by emotion and a goal or driven by a negative or positive emotion. Linda and Suzanne's joint actions driven by a negative emotion were often not interrupted and those run by positive emotions not built upon. Suzanne regulated emotion by venting emotion and Linda by suppressing its expression. Linda cannot behave toward Suzanne as if she were independent and just help her with her specific problems. While Suzanne thinks that she is independent and needs occasional but prompt support, Linda sees these needs as an indication of Suzanne not being independent.

Working with Emotion in Transition Counseling

Identify Goals, Steps, and Emotions

Identification of parents and youths having shared or joint goals, as well as individual goals, holds enormous significance for the emotional quality of the parent–youth interactions and the emergent construct of adulthood. This case example highlighted the role that negative emotions played in both individual and joint-action processes. These emotions both impacted and were reinforced by the ongoing relational processes even though Linda and Suzanne's stated goals for the transition project were similar. Capacities for individual and joint emotion regulation will be therapeutically enhanced as parents and youths identify goals that underlie actions as well as projects, and goals for ongoing processes as well as outcomes. The next step would be to identify the specific emotions that energize specific goals and how conflicting emotions can lead to ambivalence that neutralizes actions. As part of this discussion it is imperative to identify how negative emotions can energize life-limiting action often without the awareness of the actor or actors. Suzanne's frustration with her mother led to hostile and critical actions, while Linda's fear about her daughter's fragility seemed to energize her to allow her daughter to be critical and unable to set healthy personal boundaries. This pattern eventually led to Linda's frustration and critical response to Suzanne, thus reinforcing Linda's belief that Suzanne was hindering her transition to adulthood.

Explore the Goal-Directed Nature of Disagreement

Linda and Suzanne's patterns of disagreement and argument functioned as their primary means of communication. From an action lens, this pattern acted as a linkage that served a relational purpose: it became a way of both connecting and distancing. Engaging in conflict with the Suzanne appeared to meet Linda's desire to play a role in her daughter's transition project and to alleviate her fear that the daughter would not function well without her involvement. For Suzanne, conflict also served to maintain closeness with her mother, as it was the primary means of getting the mother's attention, being heard and having her concerns addressed. Conflict

also served as a tool for creating emotional and physical distance. At several times Suzanne identified that yelling and swearing at her mother was the only way she get Linda to "back off" and leave her alone.

Linda and Suzanne expressed the goal of finding new more peaceful ways of communicating and a healthier balance between closeness and independence. At the end of their involvement in the study, both mother and daughter identified that living apart was a means of achieving relationship growth; Suzanne noted the difference soon after moving out. Linda described feeling conflicted by relief that Suzanne was not in her personal space on a daily basis, and fear as to whether Suzanne had chosen the most effective path for her life. Linda reported that once she had identified several concerns to Suzanne, she then chose to support Suzanne's marriage and therefore the adult direction she had chosen. This strategy, on the part of Linda, enabled her take a more supportive and validating role that she experienced as congruent.

Identify Emotional Disturbance as a Joint Process

Emotional disturbance has been identified as a key barrier for some youths' process of transition to adulthood. Emotional disturbance has been defined as poorly regulated emotion that over time leads to clinical impairment of behavior (Wagner & Davis, 2006). Although initially studied in the academic setting, researchers are strongly suggesting that solutions for emotional disturbance be explored within family and other important social networks. The implication here is that emotion is part of relational processes and solving problems of emotional meanings and regulation will likely lead to positive adaptation when considered simultaneously within the individual and his or her relationships. Suzanne and Linda each identified their significant distress about their relationship. They distinguished between frustration with each other and feeling upset that particular relationship approaches were not working. Linda and Suzanne would benefit from exploring the goals and meaning of the functional steps of criticism and humor. The negative emotions being experienced within the context of this relationship appear to be energizing functional steps that are of limited utility. Identification of shared goals for both the relationship and transition project would act as an important starting point for negotiating the social meaning of Suzanne and Linda's behavior and exploring more effective strategies for communication and joint functional steps.

Parent as Emotional Regulator

The ability to maintain a degree of warmth, connection, and mutuality between parent and youth during the transition to adulthood relates to intra and interpersonal capacities for emotion regulation. When children are younger, parents optimally play a central role in both regulating their children's emotions and teaching them

how to identify and soothe their own emotions. In the case of Linda and Suzanne, Linda appeared to take the role of regulating Suzanne's emotions by reminding her about her anxiety and by choosing to absorb Suzanne's sometimes hostile interaction with her. A therapeutic intervention at this point would be to help both parent and youth identify how the parent acting as a tool for emotion regulation can hinder governance transfer. Linda being helped to reconceptualize her role as a giver of support and Suzanne being helped to develop the skills of emotion regulation and personal responsibility would eventually help change the problematic pattern of Linda's over-responsibility for emotional regulation within the relationship and Suzanne's resistance of her mother's supportive efforts. This change would have required Linda to manage her anxiety and to develop boundaries allowing Suzanne to experience the consequences of her actions.

Decide How to Share Emotion Regulation

Linda and Suzanne both reported attempting to use humor as a way to regulate stress, anxiety, and frustration of ongoing disagreement. Humor is arguably a helpful strategy but only when used in the context of other emotional regulation strategies. At its best, agreed upon use of humor can help enable one or both persons soften the negative impact of difficult emotions and enable relationship contact and communication processes to continue. As seen with Linda and Suzanne, humor played a role in ongoing the criticism of each other, but did not appear to energize more life-enhancing joint action.

Specific joint strategies for emotion regulation would have included helping both Linda and Suzanne to effectively communicate their lived emotional experience resulting from interpersonal exchanges. A more advanced approach would be to coach Suzanne and Linda to both non-defensively communicate this experience and also to then identify specific needs from the relationship that if met could enable them to move more effectively toward transition-related goals.

Explore Emotional as Well as Physical Distance

The creation of emotional and physical distance in Linda and Suzanne's relationship was a strategy utilized to reduce the emotional impact of relational interactions. Physical distance, although not a perfect solution, enabled continued relationship contact and the opportunity to allow Linda to continue to support Suzanne's transition to adulthood. Evidence of this came in Linda's self-description of stating her concerns about her marriage but then also choosing to honor Suzanne's decision and act in a supportive manner. Complete physical distance would eventually have prevented Linda and Suzanne from continuing their relationship project and would have prevented the transition project from moving forward.

During their most conflict intense period, Linda and Suzanne would have benefited from the strategy of removing themselves from the midst of their arguments with the goal of utilizing a relaxation or other emotion regulation strategy before returning to continue the difficult discussion. Emotional distancing can be effective as an emotional regulation strategy and can also give a person time to identify the related thoughts and language that best describes their current emotional experience.

Use Emotion to Energize Positive Action

The skill of emotional regulation is typically seen through positive or healthy adaptation to emotion leading to more successful interpersonal outcomes. Emotional regulation is often studied from an individual lens. A joint action framework will enable researchers, treatment providers, and families undergoing transition processes to consider the impact and construction of emotion within shared, goal-directed patterns. Disagreements at the level of manifest behaviors, functional steps, or goals can create a sense of frustration, confusion, or energize unhelpful relational patterns such as criticism as a way to influence the parent or youth toward one's personal transition goal. The development of clear and shared goals, and functional steps that act in their service, will lead to emotional congruence that will energize transition-related actions to a more sustainable degree.

The Action-Project Method as Intervention

Self-Confrontation as Intervention

Participation in the self-confrontation interview simultaneously facilitates several therapeutic steps in working with emotion. The self-confrontation interview invites the research participants to re-experience specific emotions by watching the joint conversation related to the transition to adulthood in which they participated. It is possible for the self-confrontation interview to produce a dramatic improvement in emotional self-regulation when participants encounter the discrepancies between how they perceive their own and the other's actions and what was captured on video. This experience can lead to a commitment to changing one's actions and to emotional resolution. The self-confrontation facilitates cognitive and emotional reflection into transition-related action. This is not always inherently therapeutic as it sometimes leads participants to reinforce their view of the other's unhelpful action. As well, participants who have significant emotions brought to the surface tend to have difficulty in describing the thoughts, feeling, and intentions underlying the action they are viewing.

Therapeutically oriented self-confrontation interviews with Linda and Suzanne would build on the initial identification of their goals and guiding emotions and importantly include training in the variety of skills related to emotion regulation

such decreasing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions. This training might also include introduction to strategies that can helpfully regulate the emotions of the other person. For example, training and ongoing monitoring of a regular practice of Linda asking for a time out to cool down might prevent Suzanne from making regrettable actions due to unregulated emotion.

Therapeutically Monitored Projects

The action-project method identifies, describes, and monitors joint projects over a predetermined period of time. The action-project method naturally identifies the relationship between the project in question and contiguous life-projects such as identity projects, parenting projects, and relationship projects. Participants in this method have consistently identified the value of regular monitoring and discussion about the transition project, as it helped them remain aware of what they were trying to accomplish and to regularly evaluate the usefulness of their strategies. The action-project method as a therapeutic intervention would include the researcher taking a more active role in monitoring the utility of specific therapeutic interventions that act in service of the dyad's goals, as well as more extensive questioning of each person as to how they might alter their strategies to more effectively achieve transition-related goals.

Conclusion

The transition to adulthood is often characterized by stressful emotional experiences that range from emotional excitement over likely inevitable transitions to the development of patterns of emotional disturbance. Empirical research on the independent role of emotion in therapeutic change is foregrounding the need for emotion-oriented understanding and treatment. Research into the role of emotion in the transition to adulthood has primarily focused on the youth and whether particular emotional skills helped or hindered the transition process.

An action-theoretical conceptualization of the transition to adulthood views this transition as a joint project that is energized, steered, and potentially impeded by emotional action processes. The action-project method offers potential as a sophisticated therapeutic intervention that can enhance emotional awareness as well as individual and joint regulation of emotion. This intervention is grounded in the lived experience of parents and youths and through the use of the self-confrontation interview can activate emotional experience in a way that it enables it to be synthesized with guiding cognitions and understood within the context of individual and joint transition-related goals. Deepened understanding of the joint nature of the transition to adulthood as well as the contextualized nature of emotional action tendencies will foster more effective emotion regulation and opportunity for emotion to energize positive action.

Chapter 7
Identity

Although identity is seen as important to all phases of life, it has long been understood as an integral aspect of psychosocial development during adolescence and the transition to adulthood (e.g., Erikson, 1963, 1968). It is during the transition to adulthood that individuals in late modern societies face personal and social pressures to make decisions about their future, work, intimate relationships, and their general "place" within the adult world. Since people are expected to individually pursue their life projects with few institutional supports (e.g., tenuous school to work transitions) (see Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Côté & Levine, 2002), many problems have been conceptualized around issues of identity and the self (e.g., Chandler, 1994; Hernandez, Montgomery, & Kurtines, 2006; Wheeler, Adams, & Keating, 2001).

Notwithstanding the centrality of identity during the transition to adulthood, the construct is under considerable debate. Different approaches to the construction of identity and the self abound. We describe and consider the impact of prior efforts to understand and explain identity during the transition to adulthood. Then, this chapter answers the question of how identity is constructed during the transition to adulthood through the use of the action theory perspective.

Identity in Late Modern Societies

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the locus and burden of the acquisition of an adult identity shifted from the society to the individual, likely in response to political, economic, and other social forces (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Baumeister & Tice, 1986). Whereas social roles and occupations were once mostly assigned by family members or the immediate social context, individuals in late modern society are now mostly expected to select where they "fit." Additionally, individuals are now expected to make choices that are right and good rather than following values imposed by institutions such as religious organizations (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). This so-called freedom of choice comes with the burden of searching for meanings in life (Baumeister, 1987).

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The search for meaning and ways to fit into the social context are salient during the transition to adulthood in late modern societies. Individuals encounter serious and complex choices about occupation, relationships, and philosophical beliefs (Erikson, 1968). Such choices are not just about finding a place in the world. Youth live with the cultural belief that the self is partially hidden and must be "found" through experimentation with different roles or actions (Baumeister, 1987; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). The transition to adulthood is a search for an inner self that fits into the social context (Côté, 2000; Kroger, 2000).

This search for a self has led to serious questions about the nature of identity. The questions, "What is identity?" and "How is identity formed?" are not easily answered, despite multiple disciplinary efforts to address them (see, for example, Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant, & de Levita, 1994). A fundamental characteristic of identity that is particularly important at the transition to adulthood is the problem of resolving the problem of continuity and change (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008; Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 2001). The transition to adulthood involves changes in social settings, social roles, and psychosocial (internal) changes. Do people perceive themselves as the same person across this period? As the world and individuals change, do people have a sense of personal persistence? Chandler and colleagues (Chandler, 1994; Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003) describe two distinct positions in response to this question of personal continuity and change. They group theoreticians and researchers into two positions: Essentialists or Narrativists. While a bold categorization, and perhaps not sensitive to subtleties within these positions, the labels provide a beginning way to understand the issues at hand.

The analysis by Chandler et al. (2003) suggests that the Essentialists see identity as "efforts to marginalize change by attaching special importance to one or more enduring attributes of the self that are imagined to stand outside of or otherwise defeat time" (p. 12). In contrast, the Narrativists "throw their lot in with time and change, and supposing that any residual demands for sameness can be satisfied by pointing to various relational forms that bind together the admittedly distinct time-slices of one's life" (p. 12). These positions are represented in the counseling psychology literature. The traditional view of identity representing the Essentialists has been somewhat static and individual. Consider, for example, the notion that there are a number of relative stable "identities" that one could choose from in the formation of the adult person. Certainly occupation has been chief among them, but the adult identity could include marital status, where one lives, and religious or political affiliations. Similarly, the notion of stability and sameness is captured in Super's (1963) notion of the "crystallization of the self" that was said to occur in the early stages of vocational development. The term "crystallization" is particularly reflective of the notion of sameness represented in Super's theory of career development. Chandler et al. (2003) identified identity theorists Erikson (1963, 1968), Marcia (1967), and Hacking (1995) as Essentialists.

The Narrativist position is readily recognized in the conceptualizations of many recent (and some not so recent) authors in the field of identity and identity construction, for example, Hermans's dialogical approach (Hermans & Herman-Jansen,

1995), Bruner's (1990) cultural approach, and Bakhtin's activity approach (1993). Narrativists view identity as self-understanding through the process of binding together slices of life or salient events through the formation of life stories. The self is fluid and changing through experiences and through the telling and retelling of stories.

Both the Narrativist and the Essentialist positions, taken to either extreme, have generated several problems that need to be addressed if counseling psychology wants to maintain the centrality of identity and agency in its work and as important and relevant constructs in the lives of people generally. There are significant challenges to theoreticians and clinicians if we gravitate to either a narrowly Essentialist or Narrativist position in relation to our understanding of identity.

The narrowly Essentialist view relegates the changes in social and cultural conditions after the initial formation of the self in childhood and adolescence to the sidelines. Even as we move to appreciate the cultural and relational contexts in which identity develops, we can also continue to be trapped by seeing them as external variables that impact a separate self, without attending to the centrality of process. Process is important because it addresses the question of how identity develops and changes, and accounts for how continuity is maintained. As such, process is relevant to counselors.

The narrowly Narrativist approaches (social constructionism) suggest non-substantial, fluid notions of subjectivity (or even more troubling, subjectivities) that represent a scattering and decentering of the self. This fleeting self is in response to prevailing circumstances which are in constant flux. But this raises a conundrum. If identity is constructed by changing social contexts and conditions, without persistence across time, where is the place for the person as agent? And toward what does the person act?

Some postmodern perspectives suggest that the notion of agency is rooted in the Cartesian mind/body split that no longer holds once the notion of the isolated mind is challenged. Although there are substantial philosophical, psychological, and neuroscience traditions as well as emerging views that recognize an embedded self, there remains a critical lack of discussion of the construct of agency in light of this history and developments in these traditions, as noted by Frie (2003). The question of agency also involves moral issues, responsibility, and obligation in understanding identity (Radden, 1996; Shoemaker, 1983). However, responsibility cannot be dealt with without a differentiated theory of goal-directed action.

Action Theory and Identity

The contextual action theory (Young et al., 1996, 2002) avoids leaning too far one way or the other (Essentialist or Narrativist) in understanding identity. Rather, we follow Overton's (2006) suggestion to avoid split positions and to find middle ground. In our contextual action theory conceptualization of identity, we have identified a temporal dimension in which short-term actions can lead to mid-term

projects, which, in turn, can lead to long-term careers (in the non-occupational as well as occupational sense). Thus, by recognizing the mid- and long-term persistence of one's identity while at the same time acknowledging that there are ongoing processes in constructing identity, we are able to respond to the criticism that process or narrativist approaches attend only to the flux and changes of daily life. At the same time, we focus on ongoing action within relationships and culture. By doing so, contextual action theory does not circumscribe identity in a highly internal or relatively unchanging structure, nor is it simply a stalagmite or stalactite growing slowly as drops of our engagement in cultural practices.

Action theory identifies processes that steer and regulate actions and projects. Attention to these processes highlights the agency of individuals and their social partners in the construction of identity. The processes include internal (thoughts and feelings) and social processes.

Internal processes (thoughts and feelings) during conversations serve to steer identity construction. Recollections of individuals' internal processes during conversations reveal the goals linked to actions. For example, a father's comment on his questioning of his daughter about an occupational selection reveal his goal of wanting her to think about options: "I was kind of gently trying to … not really belittle her but … to think this through a little more carefully." Recollections of thoughts and feelings also provide opportunities for self-defining reflections. For example, a young man's reflection on his conversation with his mother about major life decisions reveals how he views himself: "I actually am slowly becoming an adult. Whereas before, I would have brushed it aside and like, not really – you know, just take things as they come. But now I like, you know, things are happening and I'm like, is that significant?" Such reflections may be useful in the construction of identity (Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004).

There is a distinctly social dimension to understanding identity from an action perspective. Most significant actions, as well as projects and careers are social. That is, actions and projects and careers occur between and among people. Thus, we see that identity is socially constructed through joint actions with others. The notion of joint action in the construction of identity reflects some of the major sources of action theory (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Mead, 1934; Vygotsky, 1978).

The social dimension of action includes the communicative acts that are important for understanding identity. Behind each communicative action is an identity goal which guides individuals toward trying to achieve compatible experiences and confirmation. For example, individuals will seek to interact with people who provide self-confirming feedback (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). However, identities are understandings of oneself that extend beyond the time-limited encounter that is covered by our understanding of action. This is where the contribution of the notions of project and career is helpful. The specific goals of action are related to supra goals, such as identity, which extend over a much longer period of time. The meaning of some actions for identity and other supra goals coalesce or are constructed across time in projects, and some projects can be seen as contributing to the identity career.

With this understanding of identity as joint action, we turn to examples. The first example is focused on occupational identity construction. Occupational identity is co-constructed by exploring options and matching interests and skills with potential careers. Such matching involves a knowledge of past experiences, reflection on current activities, and anticipation of possibilities. The second example illustrates how some aspects of identity are not simply choices of becoming this or that. There are other motivations for identity. Schachter and Ventura (2008) suggest that people who intentionally take part in the identity construction of others are identity agents. In this second case, a mother and grandmother are the identity agents concerned with ensuring aspects of their culture are passed to the next generation.

Identity Construction Example 1

Conversations (action) with long-term social partners can serve as a basis for the construction of meaningful future self-construals or possible selves (Marshall, Young, & Domene, 2006). For example, conversations between parents and adolescents can help to select or shape possible selves (Marshall et al., 2008). These future construals of the youth offer potential choices that may be acted upon. For example, constructing possible selves enables planning for educational or training pursuits. The following example illustrates how potential self-construals are constructed and help shape joint actions.

A mother and her 19-year-old son converse about two possible occupational choices – law and medicine. They also incorporate, into their conversations, other aspects of life beyond career that seem geared toward the son developing as a well-rounded and multifaceted individual. For example, they talk about gardening, art classes, and volunteering in the community. The relationship between the mother and her son supports the identity construction project. The mother's obvious devotion to the son, her positive opinion of him, and her good intentions appear to have created a relationship in which the son feels safe confiding in her. He trusts her to guide him in the right direction as he makes life choices. The son seeks and accepts his mother's help, as she has routinely been willing to do.

The relationship between the mother and her son gives temporal meaning to the identity project. Both look to their past experiences to discuss possible selves. They take stock of his skills (e.g., laundry, cooking, budgeting) and think about his readiness to live on his own. They also reflect on his academic interests and skills and consider the relationship with the two occupational career choices. It is the intimate knowledge generated from a longer term relationship that is the basis for thinking about the son's future. Without knowledge of the past, they have little basis for the conversations about living on his own or occupational choices. Additionally, each understands that this intimate knowledge is about the same (continuous) person they have talked to before. That is, "the 'I' who talks to my parent now was the 'I' who talked to my parent in the past and will be the 'I' who will talk to him/her in the future." This is not unlike the importance that is given to ongoing relationships in the theory of the relational self proposed by Chen, Boucher, and Tapias (2006).

The content of the conversations between this mother and son are explicitly about constructing identity projects that can be realized in the short-term and contribute to the longer term. Consider, for example, their conversation about the son's selection of courses for the next year. The son lists some courses he is thinking of taking (chemistry, biology, and perhaps some art classes). The mother talks to him about how these courses fit his transfer from college to university as well as how the courses compliment his interests. The conversation is about the short-term project of planning the next school term but is also about the longer-term project of selecting and pursuing a career in either medicine or law. In conjunction with career planning, the process includes building on the son's newly found creative self that emerged through his having taken a visual art course in the past year. Thus, occupational identity projects are interwoven with leisure identity projects – or, in the language of this family, the construction of a "well-rounded person."

Over the course of 6 months, the son explores different university programs in Europe and North America as part of the identity project. The potential occupations of medicine and law guide where he looks for universities. His mother and other members of the family support his search and even plan some visits to universities outside of their home town. Along with the activities of exploring options for education, the son reflects inwardly about his skills and interests. These self-reflections are shared with his mother and *matched* against their understanding of what it must be like to be a doctor or lawyer. This process of *matching* has emerged in families with younger adolescents (Marshall et al., 2008). Matching is a series of joint actions that seem to help affirm the link between the youth and the occupational roles under consideration. The process also illustrates the cultural process of searching for an inner self that fits into the social context during the transition to adulthood (Baumeister, 1987; Côté, 2000).

Toward the end of the 6 months, the son begins to feel that he would like to select law rather than medicine. He spends time talking with his mother about his choice. She supports his decision making by asking questions that allow him to reflect.

Mother: So do you think then that you'd enjoy law more, like in terms of the courses you'd be taking?

Son: I think so. Like it's more like, I can kind of relate to it, whereas you know, like in chemistry, like you can't relate to, you know, chemicals, or in biology, you can't relate, you know, you know . . . thyroid glands of a chicken or whatever.

The mother continues by asking her son what type of law he might be interested in and encourages him to do more research to gain clarity about his decision. They also discuss what life as a lawyer might look like – further embellishing the potential occupational identity. Such discussions help generate clarity of the future occupational identity (Marshall et al., 2006).

Identity Construction Example 2

An action-theoretical perspective of identity construction acknowledges the goals of those involved. In the case of parent–child dyads, parents intentionally try to influence their youths' identity construction. Parents have identity goals (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). This case illustrates the goal of cultural continuity within a Native American family. Cultural continuity has been identified as an important aspect of preventing suicide among Native youth because it enhances personal persistence (Chandler, 1994; Chandler et al., 2003).

A Native American woman has a son aged 16 years. The son is involved in the local urban Native community center and doing fairly well at school. The mother and son, during data collection, are working on the son's identity as a responsible and caring individual. They discuss what responsibility and caring entail in their daily living. Responsibility includes the son contributing financially to the family and helping around the house. Caring involves looking after siblings and other family members. The mother respectfully points out the ways that the son can develop as a caring and responsible adult. The son listens to the way his mother expects him to change as he becomes an adult, but also comments during a self-confrontation interview how he makes changes at his own pace.

Over the course of several months, the son obtains a full-time summer job which permits him to contribute more money toward household expenses. His mother is proud of his accomplishments and they both comment about his contributions in helping his mother. The mother envisions his continued development as a caring and responsible adult. She reminds him about caring for his younger siblings when they talk about his plans for a family event. This press toward developing certain characteristics is similar to what Higgins (1987) described as "ought" selves or what parents think children ought to do. But ought selves, in this case, are more complex than a simple parental desire for certain characteristics. The notion of care and responsibility are revealed to be a dimension of cultural identity.

When the grandmother joins the conversation with the mother and son, the cultural connection to becoming caring and responsible is made apparent. The grandmother describes her grandson as coming from the family of a hereditary chief and, as such, having the responsibility to help care for others. She notes that, within their nation, "that's the way that we're brought up." This conversation is a process of assigning the son an identity as member of a particular Native American nation. The meaning of this assigned identity, however, is co-constructed through the development of characteristics and skills. Those characteristics and skills are part of becoming an adult within the community. These are not inborn characteristics and skills but encompass what it means to belong to a community and family.

The mother and grandmother, as identity agents, press the son to develop characteristics of adult identity. The son is not without agency in this process. He is not molded into an adult like a piece of clay. He clearly indicates his preference for the type of paid work he will do outside the home and practices new skills at his own

pace. The mother and grandmother are careful not to push too hard for the youth to behave in certain ways. They are respectful in the way that they guide him toward his adult identity.

The development of an adult identity, in this family, involves a sense of continuity through family heritage. It also involves the co-construction of how that heritage will be enacted in daily living. In the classic conceptualization, the link between culture and identity is based on the relationship between social structure and the self. In contextual action theory, we focus on the cultural goal-directed systems of youth and the significant people in their lives. This illustration highlights the goal-directed actions of three generations of a family as they co-construct the youth's identity as an adult.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have described how identity can be looked at from the perspective of action theory. In doing so, we avoid the extremes of a highly static view of identity on the one hand and highly reductionist views of postmodernism in which identity and the self appear to disappear, on the other. Based on the fundamental premises of the inevitability of action, and the interpretation of action as goal-oriented and intentional, action theory implicates identity in the goal structure of human action. This view of identity provides a different look at the old paradigm of identity theory as an interface between the self and social structure. Rather, contextual action theory offers the view of identity reflected and constructed through personal and social processes.

Chapter 8
Family

Family is one of the key loci of transition to adulthood projects. It is both a focus of transition, that is, developing new relationships between family members as one becomes an adult, and a support though which other transitions can be achieved, for example, living independently and entry into world of full-time work. Although it is consistent with action theory to expect a multitude of transition-related joint actions, projects, and communication to occur across the family system and sub-systems within the family, empirical research using the action-project method to study family transition-to-adulthood projects has focused exclusively on the parent–youth sub-system. Thus, it is this sub-system that is the focus of this chapter. However, it is important to understand that other family relationships can be just as important. For example, when the youngest child in a family begins her transition to adulthood, joint transition projects with an older sister are likely to be a vital part of her transition process. Thus, additional research is needed about transition projects between youths and family sub-systems other than their parents. However, there is solid empirical evidence about the nature of family transition projects that occur between these individuals and their parents.

Existing literature reveals that youths and their parents must establish new ways of interacting and relating to each other, as their relationship transforms from that of adult–child to adult–adult. The amount of contact between youths and their families decreases from age 17 to 27 (Sneed et al., 2006). During the transition, parents, and youths continue to experience conflict about a wide range of issues (Renk et al., 2006). However, the level of conflict reduces as the youths reach adulthood (Levitt, Silver, & Santos, 2007; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003) and complete developmental tasks, such as marriage/cohabitation and obtaining full-time employment (Aquilino, 1997; Buhl, 2007). However, this improvement in family relationships does not appear to be universal. Instead, it varies according to individual characteristics of the youth and parent, particularly the gender of youth and parent (Buhl, 2007; Levitt et al., 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Osgood et al., 2005a; Shulman & Ben-Artzi, 2003).

Parents sometimes find it difficult to shift from previous patterns of control and protectiveness, or even to know what level of involvement and control is appropriate (Jones, O'Sullivan, & Rouse, 2006). Indeed, they may disagree with each

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other, and certainly with their children, about whether their children have attained adult status (Nelson et al., 2007). This is particularly salient, given other research indicating that the way parents conduct their parenting affects youths' emotional adjustment during the transition to adulthood (McKinney & Renk, 2008), and that the amount of support parents provide influences youths' psychological adjustment (Holahan et al., 1994). Similarly, the degree of parents' and youths' satisfaction with their relationship and mutual communication influences the youths' sense of self-worth (Agliata & Renk, 2008), psychological adjustment (O'Connor, Allen, Bell, & Hauser, 1996), and well-being (Knoester, 2003) during this developmental period. Although research on the effects of youths' transition to adulthood on their parents is more limited, there are some indications from the Jones et al. and Knoester studies that relationship quality also affects parents' psychological functioning. Thus, the transition to adulthood is not only a time when relationships within the family change, but how those relationships change and develop has important consequences for youths', and possibly also parents' psychological health and functioning.

Domains of Projects and Actions

Transition to adulthood is also a time when parents and youth are actively involved with each other, engaged in projects related to youths' transition to adulthood. Empirical evidence has identified some of the domains in which family transition to adulthood projects occur: career development, education, health/safety, and relationship. Within each of these domains, families formulate projects with specific goals that reflect their individual life contexts, and engage in a wide range of joint actions related to their projects. Families often work on multiple projects at once, and sometimes a single project will span several different domains. For example, a family transition project with the goal of deciding what program of study a youth should pursue spans the domains of education and career promotion.

The specific actions undertaken within the various transition projects are myriad. In addition to achieving project goals within a particular domain, these joint actions often also reflect an underlying process of negotiating who has control and responsibility for that domain of the youth's life. Within the North American cultural context, most families are in agreement that, in adulthood, individuals should have full control and responsibility for their own lives. Indeed, autonomy from parents and being able to take responsibility for the various domains of living are defining characteristics of adulthood in the United States (e.g., Aronson, 2008b) and Canada (e.g., Molgat, 2007). The transition to adulthood period is the time when youths learn to take more responsibility for themselves and parents learn to give up control over more aspects of the youths' lives (e.g., Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Daddis, 2004).

This change in control and responsibility is evident in the actions that family members take to achieve their transition projects. The discussion and negotiation actions that are evident in all domains of projects frequently have a consultative

tone, where youths and parents are considered to be generally equal partners in the conversation. As one mother from our research described it:

> The purpose is, like, to sort through all the stuff, right, and to get to a place where it's realistic, and you're both happy, or, you know, I'm as happy as I can be, or confident as I can be, that she's gonna succeed, and she's as happy as she can. [My daughter]'s gonna go with her plan, and it's something she wants to do, it's no use making it, you know, imposing your plan on a kid. But if she's gonna go out, go to university, yeah, it's a big focus, you talk a lot about it.

This is a change from how they would have interacted earlier in life: project-related discussions between parents and younger adolescents are frequently initiated and led by parents, with adolescents more often agreeing or acquiescing to their parents' opinions (e.g., Young et al., 2003, 2006). The parent's adjustment to children transitioning, taking control of one's own life, and adopting more adult responsibilities is sometimes an explicit focus of joint projects at this developmental stage. As one of the mothers who participated in our study sated, "there's a lot of emotional work involved in the transition; the changing parenting role, and moving, her actually physically leaving the household." Another parent conceptualized this "parenting project" as a balancing act between trying to actively encourage, guide, and support the daughter's growth into adulthood, while also allowing her daughter to proceed at her own pace, trusting that the daughter will eventually make the right choices.

The transfer of responsibility and control is also evident in other kinds of project-related actions. For example, a mother who teaches her older adolescent daughter about budgeting as part of a career development project is preparing the daughter to take more responsibility over finances in the future. Similarly, a project in the health domain, where the pattern of action changes from youths relying on parents to monitor and control their exposure to ultraviolet radiation in sunlight to having the youths managing their own sun exposure with occasional parental reminders reflects a transfer of responsibility for this aspect of the youth's life. Family members' resistance to new patterns of control and responsibility also emerges through their project-related actions. Sometimes, it is the youth who is not interested in taking more responsibility, as in the case of a son resisting his parents' efforts to encourage him to move out, at least in part out of a desire to maintain a close relationship with them. At other times, it is the parent who resists releasing control, such as a mother who is driven to spend 5 hours with her son planning out possible course timetables in university, because she is worried that he will not select all the appropriate prerequisites for entry into medical school.

Career Development

One of the key tasks of becoming an adult is to achieve financial independence from one's family, usually by obtaining full-time, long-term employment (e.g., Aronson, 2008a). The connections between action, work, and the transition to adulthood are discussed more fully in Chapter 9. It must be understood, however, that family often

plays an important role in this process of transitioning to the world of work. Parents and youth engage in a range of projects to promote the youth's career development during the transition to adulthood. This is a process that begins well before the transition to adulthood itself, with research revealing that parents and adolescents as young as 13 or 14 engage in family projects focused on exploring different possibilities for future work and career (Domene, Arim, & Young, 2007; Young, Valach, et al., 2001, 2006).

Family transition projects where the specific focus is on exploring different occupational paths persist during the transition to adulthood. In these kinds of exploratory projects, the underlying goal appears to be to ensure that multiple future possibilities remain open to the youth or, in some cases, to increase the salience of multiple different occupations for the youth, particularly in situations where the youth has few ideas about what career paths to take. Career exploration family transition projects are sometimes oriented toward increasing youths' general experience with the world of work and acquainting them the responsibilities associated with a job, rather than focusing on their longer-term career options. For example, for one youth who decided to live at home while attending university and working part-time, the family negotiated for him to pay rent as part of a strategy to develop responsible management of the youth's income.

Young and colleagues (2008) have identified a range of actions undertaken to achieve career exploration goals within family transition projects: active discussion about different occupations and their requirements, and searching together for online career information resources, arranging household schedules to permit the youth to work part time, discussing together practical aspects of holding down a job (e.g., getting to and from work with limited transportation options, money management strategies), and conducting mock job interviews together. Parents are also involved in their older adolescent children's career exploration through such actions as obtaining information about the characteristics and requirements of different occupations for the youths to consider, and assisting them to obtain summer employment or volunteer work to enrich their life experience before permanent entry to the world of work.

However, transition to adulthood projects within the domain of career development are not exclusively oriented toward exploration and expanding options. Some families are more interested in narrowing down possibilities to find the right occupation for the youth or, having already settled upon a particular occupation, working together to help the youth achieve the goal of entering that profession. To achieve these career progress types of family transition projects, parents and youth engage in a wide range of actions, reflecting the individual contexts of their specific circumstances. For example, when there is disagreement between a youth and his or her parents over the youth's chosen career path, their joint action may primarily take the form of argument and marshalling evidence in an attempt to convince each other about the appropriateness of a career choice. In families where youths are pursuing an athletic, dance, music, or other career requiring long hours of practice, parents may support them by driving them to rehearsals, become involved in coaching, attending competitions, and sharing relevant experiences from their own

lives. These youths may even permit their parents to retain a high level of control in other areas of their lives in order to maintain focus on their chosen career path. For example, one young participant in our research, who planned to become an Olympic athlete, relied on her mother to schedule her time and shop for her clothes. Despite these variations, there are some patterns of action that occur in most, if not all, transition projects with goals related to making progress along a specific career path. Specifically, youths tend to seek career-related advice and assistance from their parents, who respond by providing information and emotional support. Parents will also sometimes serve as a "sounding-board" for their older adolescent children, and sometimes encourage and "push" them to pursue their aspirations.

Education

Another domain of life that becomes important during the transition to adulthood is the youth's education. Completing one's education is one of the traditional indicators of the entry into adulthood (Hogan & Astone, 1986), although the connection between school completion and adult status may no longer be clear-cut (e.g., Arnett, 1997; Shanahan, 2000). Nevertheless, current research reveals that parents are actively involved with their older adolescent children in pursuing a range of transition to adulthood projects with goals related to the youth's education (Young et al., 2008). In some families, particularly those in which the youth is struggling academically, family transition projects in the education domain may focus on the successful completion of high school. Projects in this domain can also take the form of gaining entry into post-secondary education programs and dealing with the changes associated with the youth reaching that stage of development. For example, one dyad explicitly stated that their project was focused on "engaging in making decisions around, and adjusting to the idea of [the daughter] going to university." Joint actions that support these kinds of transition projects include parental monitoring of youths' academic performance, negotiating appropriate levels of extracurricular involvement to promote school success, searching for different schools together and discussing the relative merits of those schools, parents assisting youths to complete application forms, and making arrangements to finance the youth's education.

Families continue to engage in education-oriented transition projects after the youth has entered university. These projects may involve such goals as maintaining the youth's success and well-being while in university, and facilitating a smooth school-to-work transition. Actions taken to achieve projects within the domain of education include renegotiation of the parents' and youths' financial responsibilities for schooling, discussing choice of major and graduate school options, and youths reporting how they are doing to their parents. These kinds of family transition projects can persist even when youths move away from home to pursue their education. Although opportunities for joint action diminish, the use of technologies such as telephone and instant messaging make it possible to engage in ongoing conversation regardless of geographic distance. For example, in our studies, one young

woman, who moved away to another province for university, maintained regular telephone contact with her mother to share her experiences at university, discuss her academic progress, and seek her mother's advice and support with problems that she encountered.

Within the education domain, family transition projects tend to become particularly salient when the youth is preparing to graduate high school or enter post-secondary education, and when youths are experiencing difficulty with their schooling. When schooling is progressing well or when no major decisions need to be made, these projects tend to recede into the background of the family's life together. In this situation, other project domains begin to take precedence and there are large periods of time when there is relatively little joint action between family members concerning educational success (although, youths would presumably remain engaged in individual action and action with other parties, such as professors and classmates, to make progress on their education).

Health/Safety

In many families, promoting and maintaining the youth's health and safety is an important goal that parents and youths seek to achieve in their joint transition to adulthood projects (Valach et al., 1996). Family transition projects within the domain of health and safety are sometimes oriented to specific issues in the youths' lives. Research has revealed that some families engage in projects focused on the reduction of sun exposure and prevention of skin cancer (Young, Logan, Lovato, Moffat, & Shoveller, 2005), and ensuring that the youth does not become involved in illicit drug use (Graham et al., 2008). Similar projects are likely to occur in families where other specific health concerns form part of the life context of the individual. Thus, it would not be surprising to encounter families where the parents and youths are jointly engaged in health-related transition projects around diabetes management, anorexia recovery projects, exercise promotion, or smoking cessation. Other families engage in projects where ensuring the youths' physical safety becomes a goal. For example, as one of our participants took increasing responsibility and control over her own schedule and transportation, the issue of working alone late at night and how to get home safely from her job became an important focus of the transition-to-adulthood project in which she engaged with her mother.

Youths and their parents engage in a wide variety of actions in pursuit of their projects within the domain of family health and safety. Discussion of health issues and negotiation of family members' roles and responsibilities in maintaining health and safety is common (Young et al., 2005, 2008). Parents took the lead in providing information, for example, some parents passed on information about daily UV index to children. They also provided pragmatic assistance to their older adolescent children, for example, driving them home when out late at night. At the same time, youth took on increasing self-governance for this domain as they become older, sometimes resulting in decreased engagement with their parents as other priorities

begin to take precedence. For example, at the end of her research involvement, one young woman, who described herself as "I'm playing the 'just-turned 19' game, so going to clubs all the time," characterized her communication with her mother as "it's really hard, cuz I get annoyed with her really easily in our conversations, like at home whenever I talk to her, I'm just like 'shut up, like don't talk to me. Just leave me alone' and I get really really edgy with her." This was in striking contrast to how she had perceived herself 8 months earlier, before she had become involved in the nightclub scene:

> I can be independent when I need to be independent, but I'm very dependent, like. (laughs) It's more like, I'm kind of needy when it comes to my mom, like, I'll come home from work and like come and snuggle with her, and like, if I'm sick, like I like, I need like five hugs a day and like that kind of stuff, like it's more like an emotional thing.

Family and Relationship as an Overarching Project

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, family is not only the locus and the agent through which other transition to adulthood projects are accomplished, but also family and the relationships among the family members can also be the focus of the family actions and goals during this developmental period. Notwithstanding the biological dimensions of who is the child and who is the parent in a family, the structure of any social agents or actors is defined by the tasks of such a group. The family has long-term tasks covered by the family career, midterm tasks as in family projects and short-term tasks of family actions. It also should not be forgotten that these joint processes are also performed by individual members who link their individual actions to the joint actions of the family. Thus a particular organization of a family for certain tasks – be it an action or a project is also anchored in individual actions with their subjective processes.

Consequently, an individual might develop certain liking or dislike for a certain family organization, which may precipitate a conflict that needs to be addressed. Consider a family dynamic where a father leads a young boy in leisure activities. This allows the father to participate in enjoyable activities as he leads, such as fishing, sports, and driving, gives him the stronger position of a skillful, informed, and successful player, earns him admiration as an involved parent, and provides him with a loyal follower, namely, his son. Being observed by the mother, who does not actively participate but also adds to the admiration that he receives, such a family structure is very appealing for the father. However, the father's attempt to apply this action structure when the son is older may be less successful because the task structure is different. The father's attempts to direct the son and take the lead throughout these interactions, which worked for their leisure time when the son was younger, are likely to be met with resistance and heightened emotions on all sides. The son has become more interested in trying out his own problem-solving capacities (rather than being shown what to do), and wants to use this task for gaining more autonomy. Thus, one of the projects the family has to address during the youth's transition to the adulthood is the further development of the family itself.

How are family members going to recognize the important tasks in this part of the family career, understand the requirements for certain family structure, and manage to restructure family processes within the family career accordingly? As indicated in the previous example, it is not only a question of finding the rational means for certain goals but also dealing with the co-occurring emotions. Gatherings, rituals, and celebrations help in marking certain transitions or ending of an old process and beginning of a new one, with the understanding that new family tasks are due and thus a restructuring of the family is required. Their significance is augmented when family members make special efforts to attend. Other transition processes can occur simultaneously, for example, a family illness or the death of a parent. Sometimes events like the parents' divorce are actually postponed to the time when the youth finishes school, that is, the time of the youth's transition to adulthood.

Steering processes in the families also change during the transition to adulthood, requiring that new procedures be established. Equally, goal-setting processes in families must be substantially revised in response to family changes. Family actions also need to accommodate the development of autonomy and responsibility in the youth; goal-setting and carrying out projects between parents and older adolescents are very different from the way these processes occurred when the adolescents were much younger. Equally, control processes, being closely linked to the control processes in individual action, must cater to the changed control capacities of an individual who is no longer a child, but is in the middle of becoming an adult. Family control processes that are detrimental to the project of developing the youth's autonomy will be counterproductive. Regulation processes in the family must also change during the transition to adulthood. For example, physically preventing a child from doing something, a useful strategy at earlier developmental stages, is unlikely to result in successful outcomes during the transition to adulthood; grabbing a 7-year-old's hands to prevent her from throwing food at a sibling might ensure a more pleasant meal-time, but attempting to physically restrain an 17-year old from leaving the table while her father is in the middle of lecturing about the advantages of law as a profession is unlikely to work. Although trivial, these examples illustrate the importance of regulating family actions and projects and demonstrate the necessity of developing regulation strategies that are acceptable to all family members.

Maintaining a good relationship or improving a problematic one in the family may be similar to the function of individual emotions, that is, serving to energize actions and projects, in terms of the family atmosphere. Individual emotions should be unburdened from past traumas and future anxieties to be able to monitor the actual here and now situation of an action. Such emotions energize as well as calm actors through a mildly positive view of the past and confident hope for the future (Valach, Young, et al., 2002). Similarly, the family atmosphere should be free from the interference of old conflicts and traumas, suggesting that the present state of affairs can provide security for the future and a contended way of looking back.

Indeed, our research has revealed that focusing on the relationships within the family is an important project for many families during the transition to adulthood. These projects typically have the goal of developing ways of relating that reflect changes in youths' developmental stage (from adolescent to adult), and life circumstances such as moving out of the family home or entering the world of work.

Family transition projects within the relationship domain are often motivated by a desire to maintain existing emotional connections and quality of communication as the youth transitions to adulthood. The situation is different for families experiencing problematic emotional connections or communication. They still express a desire to find new ways to relate to each other, but many only partially achieve this goal, or find unanticipated solutions. For example, in one of our families, the action of the daughter moving out of the family home was perceived by her parents as achieving progress on their relationship project because it led to fewer opportunities to fight with each other.

Parents and youth who have a positive relationship may be concerned that, as the youth separates from the family, the parent–youth relationship will diminish. In such circumstances, as we have seen in our data, some parents and youth focused on maintaining their positive relationship as part of the transition to adulthood project. In other families we found that separation and decreasing contact was the parent–youth joint goal, because doing so appeared to reduce emotionally distressing interactions.

The kinds of actions that families undertake to achieve relationship goals are similar to those undertaken to pursue transition-to-adulthood projects in other life domains. Parents and adolescents actively discuss the quality of their mutual relationship and their hopes for what the relationship will be in the future. It should be noted, however, that they sometimes disagree with each other, such as one family in our research where the mother desired an ongoing close connection with her daughter after she left for university, but the daughter was convinced that she would not miss her mother or spend much time in contact. In this family, working through the disagreement and negotiating a mutually agreeable vision for their future relations became a focus in itself.

Young and colleagues' (2008) research revealed that, in addition to conversation and occasional arguments, parents and youths engage in other activities designed to maintain or improve their mutual relationship. These kinds of family transition projects are often supported through intentionally spending leisure time together, for example, going for long walks together; having special dinners together to celebrate accomplishments, and holidaying together. Families sometimes perceive the process of youths taking on more household responsibilities, such as taking the family car in for servicing or looking after younger relatives when extended family visit, to be actions contributing to relationship maintenance or improvement. These actions not only reduce daily burdens, but are often conducted in response to parents' requests for assistance. For some parents and youth, particularly young women, a close mutual relationship is also encouraged by choosing to engage together in spiritual activities such as praying together, attending temple together, and jointly engaging in acts of service (Domene, Socholotiuk, & Young, in press).

Occasionally, family members will take action to force a sudden change in relationship. For example, in one of our studies, a youth chose to pursue university at an institution that was geographically distance from the family home, despite the added financial burden, because of her relationship with her mother. She stated, "I would really rather live by myself; or with a roommate or something like that. Just 'cause

I like, I really like change and . . . I just . . . I just can't do it. (laughs) [Living with her] would just be too much," and "I don't get homesick, or anything like that, or like mother-sick or father-sick . . . one summer I went to my Dad's for the whole summer in California, and I didn't miss my Mom. My friends, and my brother and that was about it. My cat." Another youth moved in with her romantic partner due to ongoing conflict with her parents, and a third decided to live with his father in response to the pressure and control that he perceived his mother to be exerting over him. Presumably, sudden relationship change can also be initiated by parents, through such actions as presenting their child with an ultimatum of getting a job or moving out. In other families, the development of a new relationship is much more gradual, with youths and parents slowly developing new ways of relating to each other as the youths become more autonomous.

Family transition-to-adulthood projects in the relationship domain are not isolated from projects in other domains of the youth's life; parents and youths engage in joint action that can simultaneously promote their mutual relationship and advance the goals of projects in other domains. Additionally, examining the relative priorities that families give to their various projects, it appears that projects with relationship goals form a super-ordinate project that often encompasses and enters into transition projects with career development, education, and health/safety goals.

Conversations and other joint activities that take place in other domains can also provide an opportunity to maintain connection and relationship with each other. Sharing one's career aspirations with one's parents or safety-related fears with one's children requires a certain degree of vulnerability and trust, as does requesting assistance or offering suggestions. In turn, if this vulnerability and trust are respected by other family members, the action can forge closer connections within the family. Additionally, successfully accomplishing goals after an extended mutual effort together, for example, earning a scholarship after spending substantial time together to prepare applications or becoming proficient in another language that the parent has taught the youth, can also improve the quality of the parent–child relationship. Finally, maintenance of a close relationship is sometimes an explicit component of projects that are ostensibly focused on other life domains. Choosing indoor joint leisure activities, for example, ones that limit exposure to sunlight, not only allows parents and adolescents to support each other in achieving health-related goals, but also provides an opportunity to connect with each other. Similarly, many of the conversations about which universities the youth should attend (observed in the Young et al., 2008 study) included explicit discussion about the possibility of moving away and how this would impact the parents and youths' mutual relationship.

Degree of Focus in Family Transition to Adulthood Projects

Research on the joint projects that parents engage in with younger adolescents has revealed that family projects vary systematically according to the degree they are specific and focused (Domene & Young, 2008). That is, in some families, goals

are clearly specified and focused, people tended to engage frequently in activities related to their projects, and substantial progress is usually made in achieving their goals. In other families, projects tend to be ill-defined or understood differently by different family members, project-related actions occurred sporadically and appeared to be separate from people's daily living, and family members often had difficulty with managing conflict and regulating their emotions. The same patterns of being focused or unfocused may carry over to the projects parents and older adolescents, including family transition-to-adulthood projects.

Indeed, dyads in our studies varied widely in terms of how focused their transition-to-adulthood projects were. For example, in one focused family, their project was clearly defined as "working together toward [the son's] increasing responsibilities as an adult, including developing the skills that he needs to manage his new roles; and negotiating his level of independence." Mother and son had a clear, congruent understanding of what this project involved, and that working together to achieve it would primarily involve the mother being actively involved in the son's life, providing advice, assistance, and guidance, and the son keeping his mother informed about and involved in the different areas of his life, for example, school, work, and management of finances. This dyad engaged in many conversations and other joint activities over the course of their research involvement, with the mother drawing back from her involvement over time, as the son demonstrated increasing competence at managing the various areas of his life. Despite this transfer of responsibility, even at the end of their research involvement, the son maintained a desire to remain connected to his mother and to hear her opinion. For example, in their final research interview, he discussed his new girlfriend with his mother, and subsequently reflected, "Yeah, I switched girlfriends, and . . . mom's seen her a couple times already. So, I'm just asking her, like, what she thinks about her because, like, parents have a say in your life. I take her opinion into account."

In contrast, a mother and son with a similar project, namely, "discussing [the son's] current activities and his exploration of future work possibilities and negotiating independence and responsibilities," had somewhat dissonant understandings of what each other's roles were in this joint project. Mother and son tended to be minimally involved in pursuing that transition-to-adulthood project over the course of their research involvement. Rather than engaging in discussion and activities together, the son's primary strategy was to pursue independence by seeking increased privacy and not sharing things with his mother. The mother sometimes sought to exert more control over her son but at other times made little contact with him, due to her busy work schedule. There was also some evidence of communication difficulties. In observed conversations with each other, they interacted in a tense and awkward way, with the mother pressing for information and trying to steer the discussion toward the son's future, while the son responded minimally and engaged in joking, teasing, and frequent switching of topics. Not surprisingly, at the end of their research involvement, this family reported achieving relatively little progress in terms of promoting the son's transition to adulthood.

Despite the wide range of experiences that may occur when a project is focused versus diffuse, the existing research indicates that parents play an integral role in the

transition-to-adulthood process for many youths. During this developmental period, parents and youths formulate a wide range of joint projects related to the youths' future and taking on adult roles, including projects in the career development, education, health/safety, and relationship domains. The actions that parents and youths undertake together to achieve their project-related goals are also varied, reflecting the specific life circumstances of the individual families. Nevertheless, discussion, in the form of conversation and sometimes argument, appears to be one type of action that most parents and youths engage in as part of their family transition projects. Similarly, even when projects are explicitly focused on achieving goals in other domains, their projects appear to be embedded within an overarching context of maintaining or improving the quality of their mutual relationship during this time of change. These processes are evident in the following case study, which also illustrates how the process can unfold in unique ways in specific families.

Case Study

The transition-to-adulthood project of Jenny and her mother, Lin, was monitored over a period of 8 months. Jenny is the eldest daughter (19 years old) in a family of four, and lives at home with her mother, father, and a 13-year-old sister. At the beginning of their research involvement, Jenny was attending university full-time (first year, studying sciences), and not employed. Her aspirations for the future include completing her degree and possibly pursuing graduate studies, getting married and having children, and pursuing a career. Lin was 48 years old and works as a technician at a research institute. She was very involved in her church, and her religious beliefs inform every aspect of her life, including how she raises her children, how she understands the world, and her future orientation. In terms of her educational background, Lin has a bachelor's degree. The family immigrated to Canada from China 13 years ago, when Jenny was 6 years old. They are ethnic Chinese and continue to speak Mandarin in the family home. Both parents were employed, and they reported having a combined family income of greater than $75,000 per year.

Jenny and Lin articulated a broad and general family transition-to-adulthood project that spans several different domains of life, "Working together to support [Jenny] in pursuing her dreams and goals, and with God's guidance to implement her path in life over the next several years, which includes education, marriage, children, and career." Lin viewed her own role in the project as that of (a) maintaining a close connection and active involvement in her daughter's life, through ongoing conversations about Jenny's daily activities and concerns, and continually providing instrumental and emotional support; (b) providing Jenny with experiences that will prepare her for the future, for example, encouraging Jenny to take charge of a family business in the summer; and (c) trying to form a new way of relating to Jenny where Lin exerts less control over her daughter's life, which is a struggle, given her perception that Jenny remains a child in some ways, and her worries about her daughter's health and safety. Jenny perceived her role to be one of intentionally broadening her

life experiences, for example, experiencing adult responsibilities through running a small business and getting involved in extracurricular activities to develop greater social skills, and thoughtfully reflecting on those experiences. Jenny also seeks and receives support and encouragement from her mother, which she views as important for her growth into adulthood. She also regards her faith in God as a critical component of her development that sustains her in every challenge she faces.

This conceptualization is representative of the transition-to-adulthood projects of many parents and youth. The two have developed goals related to Jenny's future education and career, as well as the domain of marriage and having children. Intriguingly, this focus on marriage and children was absent from most families in Young and colleagues' (2008) study. This general absence supports Arnett's (2006) claim that marriage is no longer considered to be an essential marker of the transition to adulthood by youth in North America. The fact that it emerged as an important theme for Jenny and her mother may, in part, be due to their Chinese cultural heritage.

Additionally, although they did not explicitly include it in their statement of their transition-to-adulthood project, it became evident that their mutual relationship is an integral part of their joint project. Jenny's perspective on the mutual relationship changed over time: after living away from home for the first time over the summer holidays, Jenny became interested in maintaining higher levels of privacy and independence and became less satisfied with living at home. Similarly, in self-confrontation interviews, Lin spoke about needing to find new ways to relate and interact with Jenny across the various domains of her daughter's life; new ways that reflected Jenny becoming more adult. Lin recognized that developing new ways of relating would require a shift in her behavior as a parent, and accepting the fact that Jenny is growing up. Despite the actions that mother and daughter took to develop more adult ways of relating to each other over time, Lin and Jenny both continued to perceive their relationship to be a close one at the end of their research involvement.

Their mutual relationship was also a means through which Jenny and Lin achieved other aspects of their transition to adulthood project. For example, over the course of their research involvement, they recorded having many conversations about the future. Lin also took opportunities to encourage and support her daughter when Jenny was experiencing times of struggle and distress in various domains of life, for example, losing interest and becoming dissatisfied at work, becoming anxious about mid-term exams and other schoolwork, expressing a desire to no longer be single. Even when Jenny moved away from home for the summer for work, the two maintained regular contact over the internet and by telephone.

The case of Jenny and Lin also illustrates how the transition to adulthood can be a family project, where parents have as much of a role to play as the youths themselves. Lin and Jenny jointly constructed an understanding of adulthood and goals to achieve that would promote Jenny's transition to adulthood. They were actively involved in pursuing their transition project conversing, with Lin and Jenny both developing new ways of relating to each other, while maintaining a close relationship where Lin was able to support Jenny when Jenny experienced times of struggle in the domains that they identified as important parts of becoming an adult. It must

be noted that this is a case where there was relatively little intra-familial conflict, and where the transition-to-adulthood project was a focused one. Where conflict is high or the degree of focus in low, there will still be engagement between parent and youth on goals related to transitioning to adulthood, but the way in which these projects are defined and acted upon may be rather different.

In conclusion, the case illustration used in this chapter exemplifies many aspects of a joint parent–youth transition to adulthood project: both parties are actively engaged in it, it is focused, there is virtually no conflict, their relationship is central, and changes within and between the parent and youth are experienced and observed in their 8-month involvement as research participants. At the same time, this case is not typical. The transition-to-adulthood project appears embedded in a larger religious faith project or career in this family. This larger project provided a good deal of meaning and motivation for specific transition-to-adulthood action, for example, the joint discussion of marriage and having children. Thus, this case illustrates how family, career, and other projects can be interwoven in unique ways in different families.

Throughout this chapter, we have pointed out a range of ways in which families are involved in transition-to-adulthood projects. This case is but one illustration of some of these ways. Other cases reported throughout this book illustrate various ways families are involved in transition-to-adulthood projects. In all of these cases, as we have reported elsewhere (Young et al., 2008), relationship, governance transfer, and concern with education and occupation are important themes of these projects.

Chapter 9
Work

Work has always been the focus of career counseling and vocational psychology. However, the *place of work in people's lives* has emerged as a central construct within these fields only recently (Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 1993, 1996). It has assumed greater importance and sometimes replaced the interest in career because the traditional notion of career was seen as elitist – implying a steady progress toward a higher positions and higher pay – that it often excluded women, and focused exclusively on paid work. The *place of work in people's lives* resonates with a larger conception of work as a fundamental aspect of human life, and encompasses paid and non-paid work as well.

Entry into the work force is the main issue in adolescent transition to adulthood for both sexes in industrial and postindustrial societies. Although the point in time at which youth finish their vocational training has been delayed and work itself has substantially changed over the last 100 years, it still is the central topic occupying families with adolescents in transition to adulthood. Both the traditional and more recent understandings of work are important in the transition to adulthood literature for a number of reasons. In the traditional sense, work is often associated with occupation, and thereby considered as the first steps to a long-term occupational career. Work, job, occupation, and "settling into a long-term career" (Nelson et al., 2007) are frequently criteria for judging the attainment of adult status. Work, as implemented through occupation, has been one of the traditional markers of career. However, work is a much more pervasive phenomenon with regard to the transition to adulthood than simply having or not having a job or occupation.

An appreciation of the "place of work in people's lives" can begin with the dictionary definition of *work*. In the English language, it is both a noun and a verb. The noun can refer to one's occupation, as for example, "My work is teaching" or the place of one's occupation, as, for example, "going to work." It can also refer to the outcome of one's efforts, as in "I have finished my work" or it could refer to the completed works or corpus of *work* of an author or artist. Thus, work as a noun can specify the context, type, outcome, or the place of the working activity. Work also denotes the largely unpaid domains of housework and school work, as is implied in other unpaid domains such as child, elder, and special needs care, as well as volunteer work. As a verb, *work* refers to the goal-directed process in the completion of tasks, thus *to work* and *working* and *worked* refer to actions and

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contribute to longer-term projects and careers. This verb and its participles establish the link to action theory. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the European psychology of work has been linked to action theory (e.g., Hacker, 2003). In contextual action theory (Young et al., 1996, 2002), the target phenomena are defined from different perspectives as relational and contextual issues. They are socially meaningful, subjectively experienced, and systematically observable. To work is a general type of action that is socially defined as work, personally experienced as such and, in its realization, requires groups of sub-actions to be undertaken, thus has a manifest side to it. For example, I have to move the pencil across the sheet of paper as I write this sentence as well as think about what I want to say, and decide when to begin a new sentence. As I do it as a part of my assignment as a university faculty member, this activity is socially considered as work. As well, the action of work can contribute to longer-term sequences of actions that go to comprise a project, such as painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or working as an information technologist, which might be part of my career as an artist or an IT professional or may be unrelated to my professional career and be instead part of my career as a family provider.

Work is one of the primary experiences and metaphors of human life. It often refers to aspects of our lives that are obligatory, tiring, disciplined, serious, rational, and purposeful, while aspects that are voluntary, refreshing, spontaneous, and informal are referred to as play (Loizos, 1980). Thus, work activity in the short- or long-term is personally and socially related to our upkeep. It is invoked when we have to attend to the requirements such as shelter, food, or protection. Work engenders the notion of "we have to work in order to survive." To facilitate the outcomes mentioned above, that is, employment and occupational career as well as managing one's own life, families, and schools have socialized young people to work, that is, to engage in activities whose purpose is suggested to be beyond the action itself. School work and household chores represent kinds of work that begin early and persist in the socialization of the young person to present and future roles. Learning work skills, accepting a work task, pursuing or postponing work goals, and cooperating in, leading, or subordinating oneself in work are aspects of that process. The focus on work activities between parents and children can be seen in many joint actions and projects, but work takes on particular meaning and salience during the transition to adulthood. A number of issues are frequently connected with how adolescent work is constructed within families. For example, part-time work, undertaken by a student in secondary school, can be seen by parents as reflective of increased responsibility and by adolescents as leading to increased independence. Independence for the adolescent is represented not only in the financial rewards of part-time work, but the increased time away from home and parental supervision as well as providing the opportunity to socialize with adults in a different way than is usually the case in families and schools.

A Taxonomy of Work in People's Lives

The preeminence of work in human action and life calls for a more comprehensive understanding than definitions themselves can provide. Blustein (2006) offered

an integrative taxonomy to understand the functions that work plays in human and social life, that is, its social, survival, and self-fulfillment dimensions. Specifically, he suggested that working is first, a means for survival and power, that is, it is a means of surviving, obtaining money in exchange for one's work as well as obtaining social power and prestige. Second, working is a means of social connection and interpersonal relations by providing specific interpersonal connections and relating the worker to the larger social context. Finally, working functions as a means of self-fulfillment and self-determination. These functions ascribed to working reflect issues that parents and youth address in the process of the transition to adulthood. As parents and youth engage in joint projects regarding the transition to adulthood, work in its various functions has figured largely in them.

An understanding of work as a means of survival and maintaining and enhancing one's standard of living was clearly part of many of the parent–youth transition to adulthood projects. Indeed, the transition to adulthood, which parallels the transition from school to work in terms of age group, is actually about operationalizing and implementing a means of survival for the young person. Survival represents an important super-ordinate goal for many goal-directed actions and projects, but one that operates at a more tacit, even unconscious way. In our studies, parents and youth rarely spoke about it explicitly, but it encompassed the projects that were oriented to work.

The second function of work described by Blustein (2006), that of working as a means of social connection, is less explicit in the families whom we observed in our studies. Many adolescents seem to have established a meaningful social network as adolescents and students in high schools and colleges, although as noted earlier, work, including part-time and full-time work, provides important social connections for young people. The parent–youth joint projects were often about negotiating dimensions of those social connections as other chapters in this book point out. We did not see specific evidence of parents and youth focusing on the beneficial social connections that would be established through work, except in the most tacit ways. In some cases, the opposite was true, in that the social context of work would serve as a distraction and have a negative socializing influence on youth. Of course, parents and youth implicitly recognized that work links workers to the broader social milieu. For this reason, finding meaningful work was at the base of many of the parent–youth transition projects in which these families engaged. Thus, social inclusion through work functioned as a super-ordinate goal in many parent–adolescent projects.

The third function of work in Blustein's (2006) taxonomy refers to the fact that work provides the opportunity to, in the words of Super (1963), implement a self-concept. Other approaches to work and career have also reflected the connection between personal qualities and work, not the least of which is the fit that people seek between personal abilities and attributes and the work environment (e.g., Holland, 1997). The prevalence of the belief in this link between interests (personality) and work satisfaction in Western society is highlighted in the parent–youth projects about the transition to adulthood. Finding something that one likes to do, is good at, and can succeed at characterized the projects in several families in our data sets. As parents and younger adolescents take the longer view of the transition

to adulthood, the link between interests and motivation is seen as having particular importance. Having personally meaningful goals in work and quasi-work related activities are seen to foster work-related virtues such as persistence, industry, and commitment, and thus lead to eventual survival functions of work in long-term occupations and career. Participating in work allows us to grow in socially organized task systems of which individual works are a part.

Action and the Work Project

The three dimensions of the taxonomy Blustein (2006) proposed reflect to some extent the perspectives of action proposed in this book. Parent–youth projects regarding the transition to adulthood reflected a complex interweaving of these three dimensions. Indeed, looking at the way in which working was represented in these family projects in just one of the dimensions of Blustein's taxonomy would shortchange understanding the complexity of the transition to adulthood project. All of the projects, viewed from the perspectives of manifest behavior, internal processes, and social meaning, captured aspects of working as survival, working as reflective of personal interests and motivation and in the service of personal construction, and working as social connection, respectively. What is additive from an action theory viewpoint is that these perspectives are represented in any and all joint actions. A case illustration may be helpful at this point.

The Case of Jen and Noah

The importance and possibility of work in the transition to adulthood is illustrated in the case of a mother (Jen) and her 18-year-old son (Noah). Jen is a single mother living with her sons of whom Noah is the second eldest. Noah's full-time employment immediate following secondary school is sanctioned by both Jen and Noah as an opportunity for vocational exploration by Noah, so both jointly and individually this mother–son project is about facilitating the processes that will eventually energize and motivate Noah's work. In this case, Noah is initially employed in an automobile dealership as a car washer. He sees this job as an opportunity, but his own plans for the future are unclear. When asked in the opening interview what he wants to do in the future, he replied, "At the moment, I'm not too sure what I want to do, because I did work as a carpenter's apprentice for a couple of months, but it just wasn't me. I kind of went, 'Hmm.' You know, since I've been working for [names car dealership], there are so many other places I can go to. And for that you just gotta start where I am and work your way up."

During the course of their involvement with our study, Noah changed jobs to become a part-time courier delivery person. These occupations appear to serve as a kind of moratorium while Noah decides about further possibilities. Both Noah and Jen also want Noah to use this experience of employment to be a period of learning greater responsibility and independence. Jen hopes that clearer and more substantial

career goals will arise for him through this work, again representing the link between interests and work for this mother and son. However, there is clearly tension between them about the suitability of his occupational choices in their interaction. Jen stated in the opening interview, "I gotta drag him down every once in a while" and say, "Well, let's stop, it's time to take a look at what you're doing." Her hope is that she will be involved in his transition to adulthood project. Jen stated, "I'm hoping that when Noah starts thinking about what he wants to do in his life at least he lets me in on the secret so that's it's not a big surprise." Jen is employed as a school teacher and may have higher aspiration goals for her son. Although not explicitly stated as such, a conflict between survival and long-term self-fulfillment, which Jen sees as important, and the social and more immediate self-fulfillment goals that Noah's aspires to are represented in this parent–youth project. In their final conversation as part of our study, this tension surfaces in the following exchange about looking on the Internet for jobs:

Noah: . . .Have you been looking on the Internet [for jobs]?
Jen: For you?
Noah: Well, have you been looking for me?
Jen: No, but I could.
Noah: Oh, dear . . . [you would be looking for] a doctor job and a lawyer job.
Jen: Well, you would have to go to university for those things. At this point, I don't think you're into that. . . .

The tension between Jen and Noah is manifest in other ways as well. There appears to be an awkwardness and disconnectedness in their joint conversations as well as in their inability to make time at home for joint activities. As well, a tension within Jen herself suggests she wants to pull away from her engagement with Noah about work and, at the same time, encourage his independence. She also maintains a strong parental role by making his life at home comfortable, for example, by doing his laundry, and by continuing to discuss work issues with him. Noah is also experiencing tension around these issues. He pulls away from his mother by not engaging with her and engaging in a defensive way by teasing and joking when he is with her. For example, he commented about his mother's suggestion that he apply for other jobs: "I'll just think of this stuff and it'll pass through my mind and she'll start talking to me about it. Oh, yeah, what's up about this? I don't know if I want to tell her cuz then she'll chase after me about it." Noah clearly wants independence to take steps toward becoming an adult, which even part-time works provide him, but living at home continues to be his comfort level.

It also seems that he believes that whenever he chooses anything other than menial work, it is his mother's rather than his choice. Taking jobs that his mother disagrees with is a way for Noah to assure himself of his feelings of independence. The employment and work experience in this case have distinct meaning for both the parent and the youth. In addition, the work experience seems to contribute to the relationship between Jen and her son, Noah.

From Jen's perspective, her goal of this project is something that is far off. To some extent it may be elusive, that is, her son actually going to further education and finding a substantial, meaningful occupation. At one level Jen believes that their

joint engagement will help them individually and jointly realize their goals; however, as long as the goal remains elusive, she may try different functional steps and her cognitive and emotional monitoring may change. For example, she may become disappointed or frustrated that her goals are not being met. Cognitively, she may begin to doubt her ability to influence her son. In fact, she believes that her available interpersonal style whereby she withholds judgment creates a positive, open relation with Noah. He, on the other hand, actively avoided substantial discussion with his mother so that she would not "chase after" him.

This case stands in stark contrast to the case of a mother and her 19-year-old son. This mother and her husband are immigrants from China and there is a younger sibling in the family as well. This young man, a university student, has various part-time jobs during the course of his and his mother's involvement as research participants. While the project between them has to do with increasing the son's responsibility and negotiating his greater independence, these translate for the mother as increasing his financial independence through more part-time work as well as dealing with her son's laziness. The particular type of part-time work and its usefulness for exploring future work options are not considered by either the mother or son. While it was not clear whether this family was experiencing financial hardship, as could be the case with an immigrant family, clearly the mother wanted her son to take responsibility for his real as well as his discretionary expenses.

Work provides an opportunity to illustrate the relations among action, project, and career that characterizes the action theoretical perspective taken in this book. Essentially, paid work is frequently looked upon as career, that is, as the basis for long-term meaningful engagement across the lifespan, meeting the three components identified in Bluestein's taxonomy. The challenge in the transition to adulthood is that the intermediate steps are not attended to. Young people and those supporting them may equate work and career too readily and perhaps do not appreciate to the extent that they might, that work as action and work as project have to precede work as career.

Disengaged Experience

Further to the understanding of work presented thus far in this chapter, Schmidt, Rich, and Markus (2000) also distinguished *disengaged experience* that is neither work nor play. They found that adolescents spend about one third of their time in activities that seem less structured, less oriented toward life goals, and less interactive than work or play activities. What is of concern to these authors is not that adolescents have such disengaged experiences, but the amount of time they account for. Many parents and youth in our studies undertook to address the issue of youth engagement in some way, whether that was through increasing responsibility for one's own life, planning and becoming involved in educational and vocational opportunities or engaging differently and productively with each other. The issue of engagement versus disengagement is manifested in several ways in the following case.

The Case of Phillip and David

Consider the case of a father, David, and his 17-year-old son, Phillip, who is in first year university and has had several part-time jobs in retail sales and as a restaurant dishwasher. In this family, Phillip's history of marijuana and alcohol use, which at times has been heavy, has interfered with his school and work performance. He has considerable interest in music and creative writing. David and Phillip understand that they are working together to address the changes going on in the Phillip's life. Both are working toward the youth's independence from parental control and influence. They see their joint projects as active engagement in what is happening in the Phillip's life. David is concerned that his son does not make the wrong decisions vis-à-vis substance abuse, and at the same time is making the right ones. The father, however, cannot express these concerns verbally to his son.

Many of their joint conversations reflected work-related concerns, for example, having skills for employment by returning to university after completing his first year rather than taking a year off to travel. At the same time, David expressed his frustration with his son's part-time work that was inconvenient for the family, that is, that Phillip was not available for family holidays. There was a push and pull about work in their joint projects. The father's concerns included how fatigued his son was because of his job, the unreasonable works shifts that were required, the effort to balance work and school successfully, and working for a company where there was a risk of not being paid. Both father and son shared both long-term and short-term goals for Phillip, for example, wanting to have more time to pursue his interest in music, developing his interest in music, buying music-related computer hardware and software. In turn, Phillip was oriented particularly by fulfilling the dream to make music for a living.

This father–son project was successful from the father's perspective because through it Phillip was able to resolve the problem with drugs that he had been having, David reported, "You know, you, you don't have drug problems with him anymore. You don't have, you know, criminal problems with him." The improvement is marked in the father's perspective for Phillip and himself. He stated, "He comes home late, he'd go to a bar and have a couple of drinks, but it's not like a couple of years ago, where … you don't know if he's alive, you know, you don't have that stress." Notwithstanding David's assessment of the progress Phillip had made there were occasions during the course of this study when David has to advise his son to limit alcohol consumption at work and try to understand that if he did not drink so much he would not feel so badly about himself.

In this case, we see engagement between father and son, in the work and education activities in which Phillip is involved, and in his hopes for the future. The disengagement may be more apparent in the drug and alcohol use that Phillip engages in and has become a central concern for his father and the focus of his father's relationship with him. The contradictory evidence in this case is the amount of work, the inappropriate schedule that Phillip appears to be involved in. His schedule was such that he was going to university directly from an all-night job with just a few hours sleep in the student union building.

Work and Other Projects

These cases illustrate several other important transition to adulthood processes. Obviously, the attention to work in the transition from adolescence to adulthood is high. It is not just whether adolescents work or do not work, or whether they study or train for work. These youth were engaged in important work-related joint projects with their parents as well as with others. We focused mostly on the projects with their parents. These joint projects are very influential because of their close connection to joint relational projects, to identity projects, as well as to independence projects, among others. In the reported cases, which do not represent extreme examples, parents were trying their best but often felt helpless in influencing their adolescent children according to their values. Actually, some of the joint projects of these adolescents and parents were counterproductive and stabilized the work actions and projects their parents disapproved of. In closely studying how the parents and adolescents go about their joint work-related projects, we can identify some detrimental processes, which, in turn allows us to create corresponding counseling strategies. Such strategies would ease these problems and support work and work career enhancing projects. All the participants in the transition processes from adolescence to adulthood need to be considered. They should be aware of their crucial roles in this process. Adolescents often construct their parts in the transition project based on strategies to achieve their various aims. These aims might not always be very helpful for finding and developing work involvements that reflect their interests and abilities. Thus, while work is an important topic in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, its construction is interwoven with many other relevant projects, Furthermore, the priority of one project over another is often difficult for the participants and others to determine. Even more, as it is the case with linking various enhancing and sometimes detrimental projects, their interconnection does not follow rational weightings of pros and cons. Thus, constructing a joint work project – the parents and the adolescent want to use all the available resources, from financial and structural resources to abilities, motivation, interest, and cultural values, and build up optimal education and training for the best possible working career – does not always proceed in a direct and straightforward way. It becomes obvious that linking the interests and abilities of adolescents and job requirements as conceptualized by classic career counseling theories is the least problematic and difficult part of the transition in the context of a work project. The following brief list illustrates the variety of projects connected to work projects which can be enhancing and detrimental in different ways.

Occupational Identity and Work Projects

As indicated in this book, we propose that identity-related activities, thoughts, and feelings can be seen as identity projects. These identity projects are embedded in a long-term process which can be seen as an identity career. It is known that identity

is a social process, thus it is obvious that identity projects involve individual as well as joint processes.

Financial Projects and Work Projects

Financial issues in the lives of adolescents in the transition to adulthood, as well as in adulthood itself, are important because finances, money, property, and assets are an abstract embodiment of our trust in society (money). They represent important resources, enable or restrict us from participating in certain areas of life and society, possess certain functions, and have to be dealt with in goal-directed systems. They also represent certain gratifications, access to power and goods, and a measure of success in providing services considered valuable in the given society. Thus, work projects are often, but not always, connected to financial projects, sometimes in a congruent manner, other times in a conflicting one.

Lifestyle Projects and Work Projects

In our societies, work takes up the majority of waking hours in the day and days in the lives of most people. Thus, it provides a certain context for one's lifestyle. One cannot work in banking and expect physically challenging work outside in the wild, nor can one engage in a lumberjack's life in a business suit. Talking to adolescents, we often hear comments like, "I want to work outside and not in the office," "I want to be independent in organizing my day," "I want to work with people." These are goals or wishes related to lifestyle projects and are linked to work projects.

Romantic Relationships Projects and Work Projects

Existing or expected romantic relationships can impact work projects substantially. The wish to be together in the same town, of achieving a similar educational degree as one's partner, of answering the partner's implicit or explicit wishes are a few examples of the link between romantic relationship and work projects.

Sexual Identity Projects and Work Projects

Developing sexual or gender identity project significantly impacts work project as gender stereotype congruent or opposite to the stereotype of the occupations are considered with a reference to the sexual or gender projects. The influences can stem from the adolescents themselves or can be imported to work projects in an enhancing or detrimental manner.

Peer Relationships Projects and Work Projects

This connection is well known in its very simple form, "I want/do not want to do this or that because a friend or some else is doing or not doing the same thing." Sometimes it is not verbalized but it often is considered. Obviously, any other connections are possible at any level of the organization of the target goal-directed processes (Young et al., 1999).

Hobbies Related Projects and Work Projects

As adolescents' hobbies and their hobby-relevant projects stem from their interests, they often are influential in the work projects. Music, dancing, sports, such as surfing, are often mentioned when joint work projects are studied. Parents can feel torn with such wishes on the part of their adolescent children, feeling that such a career would not provide for the function expected from a work career, on the one hand, and can feel restricted in intervening because they sense that there is a lot of personal motivation behind such a decision or choice. Often parents settle for supporting such hobby projects when a work project is followed with comparable enthusiasm.

Health-Related Projects and Work Projects

Joint health-related projects play an important role in parenting projects (Valach et al., 1996; Young et al., 2000, Young, Lynam, et al., 2001). They are also very influential in work projects. Currently, while parents often ask adolescents to consider the impact of their work on their health, the adolescent might be more outspoken about the health of all, as implied in the environmental issues or might attempt to define health and healthy lifestyle in a different way than their parents. Sometimes the parents' health conditions after life-long engagement in work projects and career provide the youth with a negative example of an unhealthy work involvement they do not want to repeat.

Many other projects related to work operate in the adolescent–adulthood transition. Youths and others involved with them in these projects must coordinate these projects and deal with conflict between them. In addition, they must coordinate the actions related to particular projects as well as the intended career that may emanate from them. But it is in joint action that is the "here and now" of the work-related developments. Though such actions are defined by a goal, the trigger, onset or beginning of an action is far from rationally purposeful. Many emotional memories, strategies that have become habitual, steering, control, and regulation processes can sidetrack the course of an optimal work project. For example, peer pressure may inhibit an adolescent from adopting successful interpersonal and communication skills. Emotional memories of being nagged by a parent may be detrimental to

the adolescent hearing useful and thorough information provided by a parent. Fear of being rejected when showing weakness might stop an adolescent from asking for information or trying the unknown. Similarly, parents' fear of being rejected might deter them from providing timely information. An ongoing fight for power between a parent and an adolescent might stop the parent from offering positive support to the adolescent, with the consequence of corroding their relationship and making the adolescent more insecure. A desire to gain respect in a peer relationship and to enhance a peer relationship project might motivate an adolescent to put the recreational drug use high up on her agenda and postpone pending involvement in a work project. Advantages of financial independence to foster the possibility of a romantic relational project might make the adolescent reconsider and reject long-term training. An emotional memory gained in a childhood venture which ended in parental disapproval might manifest itself in the substantial insecurity an adolescent has in relying on his own judgment and abilities, with the consequence that the adolescent engages in a work project characterized by low ambition. Preferential emotional regulation through food intake learned in the parent–child relationship might lead to obesity in adolescence. This obesity, which could be seen by an adolescent as socially detrimental, may lead the adolescent to socially withdrawing from work projects. Some youth may give high priority to emotionally urgent engagement in the parent–youth relationship, but it may be at the cost of developing an adequate work project. Some of these decisions are premeditated, others are conscious, still others on which decisions like this are based are not conscious, but can be brought to the attention of the adolescent and the other participants in counseling.

These examples of connections between various projects and the work project indicate that it is necessary to work on the optimization of work enhancing projects and their links with other relevant projects. Thus, the supporting work of a transition counselor would not involve search for the detrimental risk factors which cause certain developments in the work projects but for optimizing of the involved processes addressing all relevant issues.

Conclusion

The data and perspective taken in this chapter illustrate the complexity of the place of work in people's lives. Work not only fulfills the functions that Blustein (2006) identified, but it has important precursors in the joint parent–youth projects about work that are part and parcel of the transition to adulthood. Both parents and youth see that work is an important component of becoming adult in our society. Work is means to be able to participate in the economic and social life of the community. Although not explicitly stated as such, parents and youth recognize in different ways that work has survival, self-fulfillment, and social needs. In this way, joint parent–youth projects oriented toward future work were embedded in other projects in the youths' lives. Explicit work-related projects are highlighted in this chapter, but the counseling and parent–youth projects discussed elsewhere in this book have important connections to youths' present and future work as well.

Chapter 10
Culture

Research on the transition to adulthood shows that social and economic conditions contribute to different pathways to adulthood. These conditions, although experienced individually, exist and operate across individuals. For example, youth who grow up in poor families move earlier than other youth into marriage and cohabitation (Meier & Allen, 2008). These differences can be approached by thinking about the variables of family income and education. But a variable approach only provides a social address. It does not tell us about the processes that contribute to different pathways to adulthood. A different approach, particularly when addressing the link to processes across individuals, is to consider culture.

Culture is central to understanding the transition to adulthood. The transition is not a shift in individual development that takes place within a stable or static culture. Age periods are socially constructed with historical and regional variations (Keith et al., 1994). Similarly, the transition to adulthood is not a thing or a single event but a socially constructed process or sets of actions. Understanding these sets of actions requires viewing the transition to adulthood as cultural in nature (Valsiner, 2000). To view the transition to adulthood as a cultural process might appear to discount the biological processes of ontogenesis and phylogenesis. But we should remind ourselves that the brain is seen by neuroscientists as a relational social construction, which makes the dichotomy of culture versus nature obsolete.

This chapter illustrates how an understanding of culture can be incorporated into views of the transition to adulthood and counseling practice, even when culture is often taken-for-granted processes. Beginning with a description of culture as a construct, we outline steps to making practice with youth more culturally sensitive. To illustrate these steps, we describe how the action-project approach was used to understand the transition to adulthood in a particular culture, time, and geographic location.

Culture

Although culture has been declared undefinable due to its complexity (Valsiner, 2001, 2004, 2009), we need a description or understanding of it to guide counseling practice with youth. Explicating culture helps counselors in a number of

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ways. First, it helps counselors understand their own theorizing about counseling as a culturally embedded activity. Second, it allows counselors to understand youth-to-adult transition processes. Third, it provides counselors with a framework to understand transition processes for various groups of youth. One group is minority youth. But it is also important to attend to the cultures of youth who are not considered minorities. In mainstream research on non-ethnic minority youth, culture is overlooked as if culture was irrelevant for these youth or as if they did not relate to their own cultural processes. In research addressing culture and the transition to adulthood, there is a tendency to focus on ethnic minority groups of youth (e.g., Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004), which is understandable, as it is in these cases that the taken-for-granted tacit cultural processes become visible. However, in this research, comparisons are often made between groups of youth with little attention paid to the context in which youth live their lives (Burton, 1997). Rather than focusing on certain groups of youth making the transition to adulthood, it is important to remember that all youth are agents of cultures. Finally, although researchers and counselors are often called upon to develop or use culturally sensitive paradigms and methods, it is not as if culture was just a backdrop for our scientific and professional work. Culture is part and parcel of the work of researchers, counselors, and other professionals. However, the complexity, taken-for-grantedness, and far-reaching characteristics of culture can make it a vague notion and unworkable without parameters. To set parameters, it is helpful to first consider how conceptualizing culture goes beyond the simple expression of culture.

Culture is not simply the rites of passage into adulthood, language, or music. Ritual practices, language, and music are human accomplishments suggesting evidence of culture. Culture is also not ethnicity or race. These are social addresses (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Culture is dynamic and made of meaningful joint actions and action patterns that encompass the past, present, and future (Valsiner, 2009). With this understanding, we turn to describing how culture can be understood within an action-theoretical approach.

We find Boesch's (1991) approach to culture particularly useful because it is consistent with our action-theoretical approach. He defined culture as "a field of action" (p. 29). People act within action fields; each action or experience contributes to the construction of individuals' personal histories (Boesch, 2001). People's actions are also part of the construction of the culture. Culture is dynamic; "as an action field, culture not only induces and controls action, but is also continuously transformed by it; therefore culture is as much a process as a structure" (Boesch, 1991, p. 29). This definition of culture permits us to observe the transition to adulthood as part of individuals' personal histories that are constructed through actions with others and are part of joint processes.

Both individuals and their cultural fields change over time in response to one another. The complex process of change in the cultural field yields, for the individual, "a world that appears to be ordered, 'transparent', providing the space and the rules for action" (Boesch, 1991, p. 362). This means that, despite ongoing changes, the notion of adulthood and entrance into adulthood is perceived as, if everything

goes well, somewhat ordered for youth and the individuals around them such as parents or teachers. At the same time, making the transition to adulthood is perceived as a process that one can contribute to and change through one's own and joint efforts. The most popular cultural concepts addressing issues of directing, steering, controlling, and regulating the transition to adulthood are values, norms, rules, and conventions. In speaking to parents and youth involved in the adolescent-to-adult transition, one of the most referred to cultural concepts appears to be the notion of "rule." There is a sense that there are rules, broadly understood, and an order to the process enabling youth, and the people around them, to establish or act upon, and achieve goals. But such "order" does not mean that the culture is static. Rather, the cultural field is changing at the same time as providing the space and rules for action such that individuals perceive some sense of order for their lives.

Goal-directed activities such as completing education or searching for employment can be viewed as following cultural rules for action that lead to acceptance as an adult. Here we have used the term "cultural rules" in the broad sense to include the "values, rules, images, and symbolic qualities implied by diverse contents of the action field" (Boesch, 1991, pp. 34–35). But where do the rules for action come from? We know that the human desire and capacity for meaning, for ordering what is sometimes called negative entropy, and for the meaningful integration of the structural properties of our lives, such as time, provide the fabric for cultural construction. We can look specifically to the notion of time. The past, present, and future are all key aspects of culture. Without these links across time, there is no sense of continuity of life. Rules for action come from the past or history of the peoples involved in a particular culture. Although they are complex and changing, rules for action guide current actions as well as goals for the future. In this way, the individual's transition to adulthood is rooted in the culture by the past, for example, historical understandings of education, marriage, and what it means to be mature, present affordances and constraints, and goals for the future.

The idea that the culture provides space and rules for action does not mean that individuals are passive recipients of cultural knowledge. Rather, they are active agents, participating and changing the very culture they are being guided by. Evidence for individuals acting as agents during the transition to adulthood comes from research on maturity and behavior during adolescence and young adulthood. Implicit understandings of age and maturity are found amongst youth and adults (e.g., Hubley & Russell, 2009; Keith et al., 1994; Montepare, 1991, 2009; Tilton-Weaver, Vitunski, & Galambos, 2001). These implicit understandings guide behavior (Galambos & Tilton-Weaver, 2000). For example, researchers (Jessor, 1992; Moffitt, 1993) suggest that youths' engagement in problem behavior with peers is a way of accessing a more mature, or adult status. Efforts to gain this social status likely emerge because access to adulthood is associated with power and privilege in North America (Moffitt, 1993). Youths' actions with their peers illustrate how they are active agents within the cultural field in shaping their transition to adulthood as well as their culture.

In our notion of joint action, project, and career, we go even further in explicating the processes of culture by leaving behind the individualistic conceptualization of

action as impacted by and influencing culture. In our view, culture is addressed in joint and individual cultural actions, projects, and careers. For example, in the case of Chinese-Canadian families in which the parents had emigrated from Hong Kong, we found that many parents and adolescents sought cultural continuity in a bicultural context, thus reflecting a trans-generational cultural project (Young et al., 2003). Here, culture is represented in the trans-generational career of a communication community embodied, maintained, and generated in the joint and individual actions, projects, and careers of their members and participants.

In individual action, the internal thoughts and feelings of the actor control and steer the action. In joint action, controlling and steering the action is a function of the communication between and among the participants in the action, but that communication is itself controlled and steered by the participants' internal cognitive and emotional processes. Thus, action, projects, and careers encompass joint and individual processes. Both communication between participants and the individual's thoughts and feelings are important.

Steering processes are particularly highlighted in the transition to adulthood because many of the issues are new to the participants. Issues that are new are not easily resolved through habits or unconscious processes. Habits guide everyday behavior such as two family members washing and drying dishes. But new issues are different. For example, deciding whether a young person should move into a shared residence with friends or remain at home cannot be addressed or resolved by relying on habits or unconscious processes. What people often turn to for guidance are rules. Rules are frequently referred to in coordinating the steering and controlling of individual and group actions, projects, and careers.

In more colloquial language, what we have argued for above is that culture is hard to get a hold of. It is difficult to understand when thinking about the transition to adulthood – and this difficulty extends to counseling. Automatic, habitual, and unreflective conventional action processes might lead us to forget our and everybody else's everyday work on culture. Actions in the counseling session can be understood as part of the multiple sets of joint actions and projects that youth and their social supports are engaged in across time. Counselors join in those actions because they are in an action field when working with clients. Thus, counseling is cultural work.

Culturally Sensitive Understanding of the Transition to Adulthood

We have suggested earlier in this book that counselors should become part of the ongoing projects clients bring to counseling. The cornerstones of counseling are not dictated by necessities of causal laws of nature or biological purposes. Rather they are cultural processes. If cultural processes become automatic, habitual, and not reflected on, they may not be attended to by counselors. Thus, it is important to develop and explicate a culturally sensitive understanding of the transition to adulthood.

Assuming that counseling is cultural work, counselors may use the following steps to develop a culturally sensitive understanding of the transition to adulthood (Young, Marshall, Valach, 2007). The first step toward working with a culturally sensitive approach to the transition to adulthood is to understand culture. This is not general knowledge of particular cultures. This is an understanding of culture as it pertains to human development. The definition we have used in this chapter recognizes culture as dynamic processes. Specifically, it is joint sets of actions, projects, and careers which are both guided by, and contribute to, the action field. When we refer to these actions, we imply the actions youth are engaged in outside counseling and the joint actions of the youth and counselor during counseling. In this way, counselors are not viewed as working "outside" of youths' culture.

The second step involves listening to, and recognizing, the folk descriptions, explanations, and narratives of youths' actions during the transition to adulthood. We stress the relevance of descriptions as these are nearer to procedural knowledge. Folk explanations are sometimes called "rationalizations," implying a justification process (Davidson, 1963). Folk explanations are the ways that people organize their understanding of the world and narratives are the process by which they represent these explanations (Bruner, 1990). These narratives, or representations of explanations of the transition to adulthood, may come from youth themselves. But there are other sources as well such as the significant adults in youths' lives or peer groups. Narratives are embedded in clients' stories which emerge in conversations. Narratives offer a step toward understanding meanings that are attributed to actions. Descriptive narratives are accessible by using naïve observations.

The third step is to engage in naïve observation within local communities. Naïve observations include clients and, when they are involved in counseling, their social supports. These observations can be made during sessions and through self-confrontation interviews of joint conversations with others. Observing actions and listening to narratives helps to unpack the cultural meaning of the transition to adulthood. This is not about sitting back and observing in order to learn "from" youth or their social supports. Using clients as a resource for information veers away from the purpose of counseling and may make the client feel different from the counselor. Rather, naïve observation is a process of remaining open to the narratives of youth and their social supports and supporting clients in unpacking the meaning of joint actions. This process is supported by the use of self-confrontation interviews when possible. The procedure of naïve observation is further detailed later in this chapter.

Finally, the fourth step is to think about processes. Culture is about the past, present, and future. Culture enables us to define and segment ongoing social action processes into childhood, adolescence, transition to adulthood, and so forth, to understand them as such, and to construe them in reference to these cultural goals. The transition to adulthood is about the process of leaving childhood and entering adulthood, bringing the past and future into the present actions. Consequently, current actions in the counseling session can be understood as part of the multiple sets of joint actions and projects that youth and their social supports are engaged in across time. Processes such as the transition to adulthood may be agreed upon within and across cultures. Specific actions needed to engage in the transition to adulthood may differ across cultures.

Naïve Observation

As described earlier, naïve observation can contribute to culturally sensitive counseling with youth. We highlight naïve observation here because it is an important means of information gathering and intervening. Naïve observation offers an alternative to approaches in the larger professional discourse. We describe, briefly, some of the problems emerging in the professional discourse and illustrate how naïve observation provides an alternative.

The professional discourse mainly follows two lines. One discourse questions the Western academic approach to counseling as being universal. The second discourse offers information on the culturally bound meaning of certain actions, utterances, and discourses. The first discourse is very academic; the second one is anecdotal. We can observe the arguments in critiques of career theories. For example, Stead (2004) was able to critique career theories for their extreme ethnocentric view. He also critiqued efforts to accommodate existing theories to other cultures by adding cultural concepts and models (e.g., Leong & Serafica, 2001). He suggested that theoretical concepts in the career domain need to have meaning and salience in the particular cultures in which they are developed. In other words, from the outset, culturally sensitive theories should be based on the recognition of particular cultures.

Proposals to make counseling more culturally sensitive include understanding the cultural roots and histories of psychological theories. The proposition that we should distinguish between psychology-importing and psychology-exporting countries (Castro & Lafuente, 2007) and solve the assimilation problems might not provide the complete solution. How substantial these problems have been is illustrated in the case of Japan where objectivity and the subject–object division, the basis of psychological experimentation, was not a concept until the late nineteenth century (Takasuna, 2007). Similarly, the Confucian cultural tradition, which inspired relationalism in Chinese thinking (Hwang, 2000), had to wait for a long time to become complemented by a Western conceptualization (e.g., Blustein et al., 2004; Schultheiss, 2003; Young, 1984). Many Western theories of behavior such as those in psychiatry are indigenous to societies with a shared religion and culture (Gaines, 1998). These theories cannot serve as a measure for other societies. Rather, useful theories must reflect the impact and contribution of cultural traditions and their social bases, and provide methods for including cultural traditions and social beliefs. This is what we propose naive observation can achieve.

Occasionally, some empirical literature that locates cultural differences along certain dimensions, for example, individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 2001, 2005), seems to provide some insight into the issue. However, as in physics, Einstein showed that space, matter, and time are not dimensions which could be seen as a stable back drop for theories in physics. Rather these dimensions are part of the play, part of the theories. Similarly, we have to accept the notion that culture is part of psychological and social theories and vice versa. Naïve observation offers us the best discourse window onto naïve theories, which can be valid for a large cultural community or a small joint career-related group.

Making Naïve Observations

Sometimes the term *naïve observation* is seen as synonymous to uninformed observation, which is misleading. Naïve observers are scientifically more "naïve" than professional observers, but more socially informed than the professionals. Latour and Woolgar (1986) took a methodological position by stating that their ethnographic observations were conducted by applying the perspective of a "very naïve observer." They described the "naïve" investigators' perspective as that of an outside observer who does not know the language and the customs of the natives. The contrary is the case in our research and practice (Valach, Young, et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005). The participants in the particular communication community are informed, though scientifically naïve observers.

Making naïve observations is fairly simple. First, we choose target behavior processes, that is, we identify actions we want the naïve observers to describe. Next, naïve observers should be clearly identified, for example, nonprofessionals from our own culture or from another culture or subculture. Naïve observers can come from a group of people participating in the same target behavior. Naïve observers can also come from a group which has not participated in the target phenomena, but understanding of this particular group is important to the researcher or counselor.

Having selected the target behaviors and naïve observers, the next step is to present the behaviors to naïve observers. As we are primarily interested in descriptions of ongoing processes ("what are they doing?") and not in reasoning or explanation ("why are they doing this?"), we work with the naïve observers as close to the target processes as possible. For these purposes working with video-recording is very helpful. This is what distinguishes action-theoretical research as we have implemented it from attribution research, which asks about the causes a particular group of people attaches to certain events or actions.

Video or film recording is useful because it can be replayed easily and shown repeatedly to different naïve observers. Additionally, the ability to stop the recording and listen to naïve observers without rushing is valuable. In our research we consecutively showed naïve observers, mostly in individual sessions, a meaningful unit of behavior. This unit was a short sequence of the video-recording of the target behavior ranging between 0.5 and 3 min in various studies. The naïve observers were asked to describe what was going on in that sequence and whether they had any other information or thoughts they would like to share with us. After their description the next video segment was presented. Another strategy was to ask the observers to indicate where an action began and/or ended and about their criteria for segmenting the stream of behavior. We also asked the naïve observers whether certain action theoretical concepts occurred (e.g., decision, consideration, goal, abolishing of goal, setting up a new goal, persisting on a goal, evaluation, changing a goal, overcoming difficulties, certain emotions and others) (Valach, von Cranach, & Kalbermatten, 1988; Valach, Young et al., 2002). Finally, the extent of certain qualities in predefined sequences of ongoing joint actions could also be assessed (Valach, Scheidegger, Michel, Young, & Dey, in press).

An alternative to video is to interview people participating in comparable actions and projects. These people could provide important information on the conventions within projects and thus help better understand them. Further, people engaged in other projects might help us obtain information on important conventions, social rules, and norms. It is helpful to distinguish between self-reported subjective processes and the subjective comments of other partners. For example, it may be helpful to gain insight into how parents in Western cultures see the behavior of their adolescents in transition to adulthood and how first generation Chinese-Canadian parents see their adolescents' behavior during the same process.

Counselors' most prominent use of naïve observation is when dealing with clients from a culture, subculture, or communication community with which they are less familiar. This is not a question of obtaining translation of the language but of gaining insight into procedural conventions. The naïve observation should be generated while describing ongoing actions and not in a general discourse on cultural specifications and behaviors of ethnographic interest. To illustrate this process, we describe an example of naïve observation with a family and their social supports.

Case Illustration

To illustrate the centrality of culture for the transition to adulthood we present, next, an example from our research. This example is drawn from our research with urban-residing First Nations youth and their families. We use this case because it illustrates how globalization and migration to urban centers are important dimensions in understanding culture and the transition to adulthood. The world's populations have now passed the milestone of transforming from mostly rural to more than half of the globe's population living in towns and cities (United Nations Population Fund, 2007). Globalization and the migration to urban centers are transforming cultures and the places in which youth are entering adulthood. We cannot fully rely on past thinking about First Nations communities, nor can we rely on past thinking about the transition to adulthood in urban centers. Therefore, we sought to understand the transition to adulthood as it occurred within the particular historical time and place. To do so, we informed ourselves of current and historical understanding of First Nations youth living in urban settings. Then, we used naïve observation with youth, their families, and self-identified social supports. A case is used to illustrate some ways that naïve observation contributed toward building an understanding of the transition to adulthood for a young woman. To begin, we turned to current and historical literature on First Nations youth in Canada.

We knew, from government surveys of Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2002, 2003), that many First Nations youth living in urban centers faced difficult circumstances as they entered adulthood. Many had not completed high school and were unemployed. Their families were living in poverty and struggling to support their youth financially. Additionally, we knew that many of these youths' parents had faced considerable hardship during their own transition to adulthood due to forced

separation from their own parents to attend residential schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Bull, 1991; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Many students at residential schools experienced physical and sexual abuse along with the racism that is inherent in educational policies aimed at assimilation. Despite this knowledge about First Nations youth, we knew very little about the processes by which First Nations youth transition from childhood to adulthood. In particular, we knew very little about the transition to adulthood among urban-residing youth and their families. Our research was designed so that we could describe how one group of urban-residing First Nations youth were becoming adults.

We set out to describe the goal-directed joint actions of youth, their parents, and key significant social supports, for example, grandparents and friends, of participants living in one particular city in Canada. That is, we situated the study within a very specific context rather than trying to describe broad or general phenomena. This is important because it enabled us to avoid the assumption that all First Nations peoples are from the same culture, located in the same geographic space, or same historical period. Instead, First Nations peoples are from many cultures and these cultures are located within space and time. Thus, our efforts to understand the youth and families in our study were directed toward situating the transition to adulthood processes within the localized context.

Very little literature was available to guide our understanding of the transition to adulthood processes among urban-residing First Nations peoples. Given that age groups are socially constructed (Keith et al., 1994; Kessen, 1979), we did not want to engage in language that would predefine what we meant by the transition to adulthood. We consulted community members about our approach to this issue. With their help we decided to ask families to talk about "growing up" processes.

With an informed understanding of the demographic and historical literature on First Nations youth, we approached the transition to adulthood mindful of our understanding of culture as a dynamic ongoing process. We avoided thinking of these First Nations youth as an ethnic or cultural minority group. Such an approach would have distinguished the youth and their families as living "outside" of the researcher's culture. But we could not assume that we were fully informed about the transition to adulthood for them and their families. The understanding rests with the youth and their community. Therefore, to begin building a better understanding of the transition to adulthood for this community, we used processes of naïve observation.

First, we selected the behaviors we wanted to understand. These behaviors were those related to "growing up." The first sets of behaviors were video-recorded parent–youth conversations about growing up. Then we selected the naïve observers we felt would help us understand the behaviors. We selected the parents and youths. The second set of behaviors we wanted to understand were those observed by the parents and youths and then described to researchers via telephone calls. These behaviors were viewed, by parents and youths, as relevant to the process of growing up. The naïve observers of these behaviors were the families and the social supports of the families. We asked the parents and youth to invite their social supports to a talking circle which, although pan-traditional, is consistent with First Nations traditions in Canada. Using core principles of talking circles (see Running Wolf & Rickard, 2003), naïve observations were made about the joint growing up projects.

Through systematic and naïve observations, we were able to listen for the ways that people positioned themselves and made sense of one another and the community in which they lived. But we did not simply take away our interpretation of these observations. We sought additional assistance by asking community leaders to check our interpretations.

The following case illustrates meaningful actions across time which, taken together, contribute to the transition to adulthood for a young First Nations woman, Alexis. The actions encompass the past, present, and future, and are in the service of Alexis becoming an adult. The interpretation is founded upon the naïve observations of the youth, parent, and close family members, and guidance from community leaders.

Alexis lived with her mother Silvia, Alexis's three sisters, two older brothers, and an older cousin. Before moving to the city, the family lived in a rural area. Silvia decided several years prior to her involvement in the research project to move to the city and away from what she felt were many negative influences upon her children. At the time of data collection, Silvia's physical health was poor so she was unable to work at a steady job. Alexis and her sisters were ambitious and active at school, sports, and in Native organizations in their neighborhood. Alexis worked hard to attain good grades in school and was working on securing scholarships so that she could attend college. She also worked at a part-time job in order to help her mother cover day-to-day financial expenses.

Alexis and her family members identified themselves as members of their First Nation. They participated in gatherings of their people in the city and Alexis was active in youth programs at the community center. Alexis and her sisters frequently joined in the dances of their cultural community. This self-identification was important but it was only one part of Alexis's cultural identity (see Chapter 7). To observe and understand cultural processes related to the transition to adulthood, we looked to the actions and naïve observations of Alexis, her mother, and members of the family.

The "growing up" projects of this family focused on (a) the development of values of respect and responsibility for others and (b) learning to have a voice or an independent way of thinking about ideas. Silvia, in particular, tried to guide Alexis and her siblings toward being respectful and caring of others. Her reflection, during a family interview, demonstrated the importance of time. Her family's past influences her present actions and goals for her children's future.

Mother: They are so much different than – than what we grew up as – like we didn't have anybody to look at – like our mother passed away when we were like – I was – like – 13. And so like – watching these girls grow up and just – like a different world. And a whole different life – they've seen the worst in me as a person – and they've seen like me trying to be a better person. . .

Becoming a better person involved respecting and acting responsibly toward others. These values are revealed in a conversation between Silvia and Alexis about interacting with people when hurt or angry.

Mother: . . .like we had our down side . . . for . . . for a long time right . . . Do you think it could be because of . . . how you were brought up why? . . . I think you're special – in how you perceive other people . . . even if other people don't respect you – you still have – you still have it in you to be polite and . . . you know not to lash out at them and call people names . . . and. . .

Alexis attributed her politeness to learning from her auntie.

Youth: [Auntie], she's cool . . . she's taught me a lot. . .
Mother: [Auntie] has a lot of wisdom in her – because of the tough life that she's had – you know you know you live and learn.
Youth: Yeah.
Mother: You always learn from your mistakes or other people's mistakes. . .
Youth: No but . . . I think it's not . . . it's like kind of like split up into categories . . . how you treat people. I guess not just [treating] children but. . .
Mother: Uh hm.
Youth: We have a choice . . . on which way we go . . . we can take the easy way or the hard way . . . most people choose the easy way. . .

In addition to conversations about respect and responsibility for others, Silvia modeled care by preparing large community meals on birthdays and holidays and emotionally supporting others when a member of the community died. Alexis helped her mother prepare the food for the large community meals. Time together preparing food facilitated close connections in a busy family. It was also a time for Alexis to learn responsibility for others. When Silvia was physically unwell and could not prepare New Year's Eve dinner, Alexis cooked the entire dinner for the whole family on her own. Family members made it known, through teasing and enjoying the food, this achievement was another indication that Alexis was growing into an adult.

The other transition-to-adulthood project, learning to have a voice or an independent way of thinking about ideas, involved formal and informal education. This family viewed education as an opportunity to learn how to think and express ideas. Silvia noted how Alexis learned to speak out over the past year "Alexis – like when she has something to say it's not – not like she rambles-rambles-rambles-rambles – it's just like right to the point." The growing ability to speak ideas clearly and be heard by others was credited to education at school and at home. This seemed particularly important for women. Alexis' aunt said,

> Also as a First Nations – being a woman – and like – it's just like there's a double – double whammy there right – it's just like for these – for these kids it's getting them out of our community basically – because it's all negative there and like everybody is like fending for themselves. Yeah, and their education is – [Alexis and her siblings] education is like it's first. . .

The double whammy meant the prejudice and difficult social conditions faced by First Nations women. Alexis' mother and aunt did not want to repeat past ways of entering adulthood; they were working toward shaping a different transition to adulthood for Alexis and her siblings.

Learning to speak her mind as an educated woman in her community involved Alexis forming independent ideas. Sometimes her ideas conflicted with what her mother believed. They argued but Silvia helped Alexis deal with her anger when expressing ideas or pushing limits. She called Alexis "Bubbles" because she pretended to see a cartoon "thought" bubble of anger. That was a signal to "hold your tongue (laughing)." Alexis noted " Yeah, I can see when you call me 'Bubbles' 'cause now when I get mad – I don't say anything out loud – I just think alright when two minutes have gone by and I think in my head . . . well, it's over . . . each time."

This case illustration allowed us to understand how communities use the past and future to inform current joint actions. The adults in the family recalled the past and, looking to the future, tried to shape Alexis' entry into adulthood. Cultural practices included large meals at family gatherings. These practices were brought into the present from the past. But not all practices were carried forward. Silvia and her sister wanted the girls to be well educated and able to express ideas clearly. They did not want the girls using alcohol and struggling like their aunt. To that end, the goals of this family were acting on the culture to make changes.

The naïve observations of the family help us understand the context in which Alexis and her siblings were entering adulthood. The aunt's description of the double whammy of being a woman and First Nations revealed prejudices and hardships. It helped situate the transition to adulthood in the larger context of prejudice against First Nations communities. Silvia's narratives situate her family's past experiences in their rural home and the hardships faced in that setting. These narratives provide current and historical contextual information.

The naïve observations of the transition to adulthood were unpacked during self-confrontation interviews and larger family gatherings. By listening to the naïve observations of family members, we were able to understand the complex relationship between the two transition projects. Becoming responsible and caring for others involves education about issues and learning to clearly state opinions. By clearly voicing views on issues, adults can help protect and care for others. These narratives situate the meaning of adulthood within the actions of preparing meals for large family gathering, learning to control angry outbursts and speaking clearly, and seeking education.

Conclusion

In summary, working with youth during their transition to adulthood involves understanding the vague and complex notion of culture. In this chapter, we describe an action theoretical approach to thinking about transition to adulthood and culture. Thinking about the transition to adulthood as inherently cultural highlights the importance of history, meaning-making, and process. Attention to folk explanations, narratives, and joint sets of actions orients counselors to being responsive to culture.

Chapter 11
Romantic Relationships

In contemporary society, many individuals begin dating or engaging in other forms of romantic relationships in adolescence and enter adulthood with some experience in this area of life (e.g., Abraham, 2002; Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007; Meier & Allen, 2009). Nevertheless, entry into a committed, theoretically permanent romantic relationship in the form of marriage has traditionally been viewed as one of the markers of becoming an adult (Shanahan, 2000). Thus, the issue of romantic relationships is salient to the transition to adulthood. It is important to understand the nature and characteristics of these relationships during the transition to adulthood period. However, engagement in romantic relationships is not only a possible outcome of becoming an adult; it can also serve as the context for achieving other goals during this period. That is, youth in dating, engagement, and marital relationships can engage with their romantic partners to achieve other joint transition projects. This action-theoretical conceptualization of the romantic couple as a partnership, a unit through which transition to adulthood goals and joint actions are undertaken, is examined in depth, and illustrated through a case example. First, however, it is necessary to understand the nature and characteristics of these relationships during the developmental period spanning the transition to adulthood.

The Nature of Youth Romantic Relationships

Collins, Welsh, and Furman (2009) provide an excellent definition of youth romantic relationships in their recent review of the literature, "The term 'romantic relationships' refers to mutually acknowledged ongoing voluntary interactions. Compared to other peer relationships, romantic ones typically have a distinctive intensity, commonly marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behavior" (p. 632). Romantic relationships can take several forms in adolescence and young adulthood, ranging from casual dating (sometimes with multiple partners) to different forms of exclusive commitment, such as exclusive dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Research across different ethnicities has revealed that these relationships, particularly in their more committed forms, usually involve mutual emotional engagement and anticipation of a future together

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(Abraham, 2002; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2006; Moore & Leung, 2001). Indeed, youths' romantic partners can provide them with intimacy and emotional closeness (Laursen & Williams, 1997; Levesque, 1993; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006), a sense of mattering (Mak & Marshall, 2004), caregiving and support (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001), as well as an opportunity to develop and practice skills (e.g., acceptance of differences, negotiation, and self-expression) related to autonomy within an interdependent relational context (McIsaac, Connolly, McKenney, Pepler, & Craig, 2008).

However, depending on the characteristics of one's romantic partner and types of interactional strategies that occur, romantic relationships may also become a source of depression, relational aggression, and violence (Simon, Wargo-Aikins, & Prinstein, 2008; Vézina & Hébert, 2007), as well as hostility and conflict (Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009). This may be particularly true for young women who, in addition to perceiving themselves as having more romantic relationships than young men (Carver et al., 2003), experience those relationships to be more problematic and less consistently positive (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001). This gender difference may be a reality rather than perception alone, given research indicating that female youth often feel forced to give up their own preferences and voice (sometimes to the point of accepting abuse and compromising their health) to maintain their romantic relationships (Banister & Jakubec, 2005), and have less power and decision-making authority within the relationship than their male partners (Bentley, Galliher, & Ferguson, 2007).

The ways in which romantic relationships unfold during the transition to adulthood have been found to be influenced by a range of people within a youth's social context. A primary focus of research on this topic has been to examine the role of parents and childhood family experience on the development of youths' romantic relationships. The literature indicates that parental characteristics and behaviors can influence the formation of romantic relationships in a variety of ways. For example, the nature of the parental marital relationship and family structure have repeatedly been identified as an influence on the quality of people's romantic relationships later in life (Amato & Booth, 1997; Feldman, Gowan, & Fisher, 1998; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengston, & Frye, 1999; Hetherington, 2003; Kirk, 2002; Lacky, 2003; Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999; Tourigny, Lavoie, Vézina, & Pelletier, 2006). Similarly, parenting approaches, expectations, interactions, and behaviors have been found to predict many aspects of youths' romantic relationships, including their sense of intimacy, satisfaction, connectedness, mutuality, and youths' behavior toward their romantic partners (Auslander, Short, Succop, & Rosenthal, 2009; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Crockett & Randall, 2006; De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007; Joyner & Campa, 2006; Larson, Taggart-Reedy, & Wilson, 2001; Reese-Weber & Marchand, 2002; Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Klessinger, 2001; Simons, Lin, & Gordon, 1998; Smetana & Gettman, 2006). Peer and broader community social contexts have also been found to be important to the development of romantic relationships in youth, providing not only opportunities to engage in dating and other kinds of intimate interactions with peers, but also a social context in which youth develop an understanding of what romantic relationships mean, and how to act in

them (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Brown, 1999; Coates, 1999; Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Harper, Gannon, Watson, Catania, & Dolcini, 2004; Milbrath, Olson, & Eyre, 2009).

Although the empirical evidence reveals many consistencies in romantic relationships across the transition to adulthood and similar background influences, the literature also suggests that the nature of these relationships can change in important ways during this time. In young adulthood, as opposed to earlier in adolescence, romantic relationships tend to increase in duration and become more exclusive, steady, and committed (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Meier & Allen, 2009). Several qualitative dimensions of the romantic relationship also change as youth become older, including increases in (a) sense of support from one's romantic partners (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003; Shulman & Kipnis, 2001); (b) degree of emotional and sexual intensity (Carver et al., 2003; Meier & Allen, 2009); and (c) the use of negotiation and discussion rather than coercion as a way to resolve conflict (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996; Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). Building on this and other evidence, researchers such as Seiffge-Krenke (2003) and Meier and Allen (2009) concluded that there is a clear developmental progression in the nature of romantic relationships from adolescence to adulthood.

Romantic Relationship Projects

Two important conclusions that emerge from this empirical literature on youths' romantic relationships are that there is evidence of growth and change in the quality of romantic relationships from adolescence to adulthood and that parents and other people in youths' social world can play an important role in how romantic relationships develop. From an action-theory perspective, this body of knowledge not only suggests that one of the tasks of the transition to adulthood is to learn how to relate to romantic partners as an adult, rather than as an adolescent, but also that youth work together with their parents, peers, and other important individuals to achieve that task. That is, individuals who are transitioning to adulthood may formulate joint projects focused on developing or improving their romantic relationships.

Research conducted within the action-theory framework provides some empirical evidence to support the possibility that youth engage with their family and peers in these kinds of projects. In our research on the transition to adulthood as a family project, one daughter provided an example of how she used to engage with her family around her romantic relationships:

> I remember when [former boyfriend] and I started dating, [my mother] kept asking me, "so has he asked you out, so has he asked you out, so has he asked?" I'm like, "no! no! no!" (laughs) And then I told her, like, as soon as it happened, I was like, "mommy, guess what's happened?" She's like, "aw," so yeah, like she, like my entire family, like even my brother, they all know what's going on in my life, and I think that works, because then, if I come home and I just like slam the door, they know why. . . . It helps that we, like talk, interact pretty well.

In addition, preliminary results from a study of young adult couples' career projects indicate that learning to relate to each other in a more mature way can be a project between romantic partners (Domene et al., 2010). For example, in their study, one engaged couple described themselves as working toward "understanding and figuring out how to balance each others' values and plans for our future together." Over time, their project-related actions included activities that were designed to improve the quality of their romantic relationship, such as attending premarital counseling and changing their customary, problematic ways of communicating and resolving conflict. Another couple, who were married and moved to a new city shortly before their research involvement, stated that they were "Working together to build a new life in [the new city]," a project that included adjustment to living as a married couple. One of the specific struggles that this couple was experiencing was that they had very different interests. The woman shared what she was thinking in her self-confrontation with the interviewer:

> "I'm gonna go have fun and do something I've always wanted to do, that I don't feel I can do with you?" I don't feel like I can do that with him. Like, he's not ever gonna leave his career, he can't take six months off to go and teach English overseas. Um, so I'd either have to do it without him or do it when he wasn't around . . . I guess that's how I was feeling there, is that the only time I can do what I wanna do is when you're gone. Which is sort of an appealing part of his job, is that I have flexibility when he disappears, I can go do my own thing.

Given this body of evidence, it is not difficult to speculate that youth also engage in similar projects with their friends; projects that would be supported by actions such as (a) using them as a source of information about a desired romantic partner, (b) asking the friend to act as an intermediary, (c) discussing all the details of how a date went, and (d) seeking the friend's advice and perspective when conflict arises in the romantic relationship. This possibility is supported not only by anecdotal evidence about how youth engage with their peers, but also research about the increased importance of peers for contemporary adolescents (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002) and studies revealing that peer friends are influential in the formation of romantic relationships during this time (e.g., Connolly et al., 2000; Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004).

Romantic Partners' Transition Projects

Action theory also provides a useful framework for understanding how the romantic relationship can influence the process of transitioning to adulthood; that is, how youth and their romantic partners jointly formulate and work toward goals and projects related to becoming an adult. The concepts presented in Chapter 5, explaining how relationships can be conceptualized from an action-theory perspective, apply as much to the relationship between romantic partners as they do to other significant relationships in a youth's life. Consequently, it is consistent with action theory to propose that youths engage in transition to adulthood projects with their

intimate partners, that these projects are energized by the emotional qualities of the mutual relationship, and that engagement and progress on these joint projects are dependent on the power dynamics and quality of communication within the romantic relationship.

Although existing action-theory research on this topic is limited, there is some emerging empirical evidence to support this possibility. Domene and colleagues (2010) have begun to explore this issue with a sample of young adult couples without children, in committed romantic relationships lasting at least one year. Regardless of type of relationship (exclusive dating, engaged, cohabiting/married), participants in their study worked together to achieve goals for the future, and conceptualized that future as belonging to the couple together, rather than solely to one individual. Thus, projects such as "discovering the appropriate direction for [participant]'s career, in order to make plans for our future together," and "deciding how to finance [one participant]'s education, as well as helping [other participant] to maintain a healthy work/life balance" were equally important for both members of these couples, even though the explicit focus was on a single person's career, education, or work/life balance.

To elaborate on the latter couple's situation, financing for the first participant's education was clearly a concern for both members of this couple. As her partner stated:

> It's hard for me to support her because she's had that support her whole life . . . I feel like her life has been very, very easy compared to mine. So when we kind of talk about these money things, it's almost like she's walking into a gold mine, so to speak . . . she doesn't expect [me to pay for everything], by any stretch of the imagination, but it's still it's hard for me.

Similarly, promoting the work/life balance was equally important for both partners in the relationship; they perceived achieving a good balance as an important goal for the couple as a whole, and failure to achieve that balance as harmful for the relationship rather than only being a problem in the individual life of one of them. Thus, working on the first partner's education and the other's work/life balance was conceptualized as a true couple's project. These examples illustrate the fact that, for youth in a committed romantic relationship, the couple becomes a salient unit in which joint projects and formed, and action undertaken.

Domene and colleagues' (2010) study also revealed a range of different projects in which couples engage during the transition to adulthood. Many projects included a vocational component, such as "Balancing aspirations for a life together with making progress in our education and careers," "discussing goals and plans for housing and work while considering our differing references, priorities, and needs," and "discovering the appropriate direction for [participant]'s career, in order to make plans for our future together." Managing relationships with families of origin were also prominent in these couples, as illustrated by the following example from a couple in a dating relationship:

> Structuring and refining a vision for the future that is mutually acceptable for both of us, and trying to appease both sides of the family as much as possible. This project may include topics such as where to live, immigration, marriage and timing of life after school.

Finally, financial concerns were also prominent in several participants' projects, for example, "taking concrete steps to promote our new business and refining plans around finances/debt management in order to attain our future housing, family and vocational goals," and "jointly negotiating and communicating clear yet flexible plans that meet both our wants and needs, while considering our financial situation." Two important aspects of young adults' projects are evident in these examples: first, although projects were focused on a range of different specific issues, maintaining the couple's mutual relationship was often an overarching goal. Second, many projects encompassed several different transition issues at the same time, rather than being exclusively contained within a particular domain of functioning. Thus, it would appear that youth in romantic relationships view the transition process holistically rather than treating issues such as work and education, housing and where to live, and developing their future relationship (including plans for marriage and children) as distinct issues.

As explained in previous chapters, action theory proposes that emotion is an important energizing and steering force within joint projects. Data from Domene and colleagues' (2010) study confirm that this is the case in romantic relationships. They found that, whether positive or negative, the emotional climate within the couple's relationship emerged as an important motivator for people to engage in project-related actions. This is particularly evident in one participant's reflection on the progress that she and her dating, then engaged, partner had made toward achieving the various goals of their joint project.

> We're just really trying to work on our communication skills. Sometimes [participant], yeah, he's good at the thinking part. But sometimes he overly thinks, which makes him complicated and frustrating for me at times. . . . I support him in, if he decides to work wherever, I think, as long as he's happy, I want him to be happy. And I support him if he goes to school. I support him if he um, you know, whatever he wants there. And he's very supportive in that, too. So, we're good at supporting each other in, like, career changes or um talking about having children, finances, stuff like that, we're good at that. What we're really struggling with, you know, still working on, is the communication part. . . . I know that if we work on it and we persevere that in the end we will be stronger than anything, you know? I believe in that and I think that's why I keep holding onto this relationship. And the thing is, I still really love him, like, and that's the thing.

It should be noted that both positive and negative emotions steered this couple's ongoing actions to improve their communication: It was frustration with their different communication styles that originally motivated this couple to seek change, and their love for each other that causes them to persist in trying to "work on it," despite the fact that they have made far less progress on this goal than other aspects of their transition project, such as helping the partner with his career exploration, resolving their different perspectives on finances, and deciding on the timing of getting married and having children.

The role of emotion is perhaps more evident when the outcomes of a project are not what the youths in the romantic relationship had originally anticipated. For example, the dating couple, whose project was "balancing aspirations for a life together with making progress in our education and careers," were motivated in part by anxiety and concern about their competing ideas for the future. The woman, an undergraduate student with plans to complete a doctoral degree, described one of their differences as:

> He always said that he wanted to have kids when he was like twenty-two. And I'm like, "that's not gonna happen, like, I know you're gonna change your mind." And I'm like, "it's not gonna happen with *me*, anyways." (laughs). . . . He really, really wants like a family and stuff, and I was just thinking at the time that he's still really idealistic. . . . If we were to have kids right now and get married right now, it would be awful because it would be, financially, like, a horrible situation, and having a kid would be so stressful.

Other sources of stress included their religious differences and opposing perspectives toward the possibility of moving to the United States for future schooling and employment. These competing aspirations for their future life together led the couple to engage in ongoing action (in the form of discussions and arguments) about how to achieve an appropriate balance, and find a way to resolve their differences. In the end, however, their resolution was to place their priority solely on their individual future education and careers, at the cost of their life together. Thus, they discontinued their romantic relationship part way through their research involvement. Without the energy provided by the negative emotions that they began to feel toward each others' competing visions for their future life together, this couple may have simply avoided the issue and let the situation linger without any firm resolution.

The findings from Domene and colleagues' (2010) study are consistent with previous research on the transition projects that youth engage in their parents (e.g., Young et al., 2008) and non-romantic peers (e.g., Young et al., 1999). Thus, it appears that youth engage in transition projects with their romantic partners in much the same way that they engage with other significant persons in their lives. This information, in combination with the knowledge base about the nature of youths' romantic relationship projects during this developmental period, yields several implications for counselors working with this population.

Recommendations for Counseling

For youth who are in romantic relationships, these relationships can be an important part of transition to adulthood in two ways. Romantic relationship goals may be a desired transition outcome, for example, getting married or improving the quality of the relationship. However, the relationship can also be part of the process of striving toward adulthood; that is, our research has revealed that youth work actively with their romantic partners to achieve transition projects. Therefore, when seeing clients who are presenting with issues related to the transition to adulthood, it may

be worthwhile to ask as a part of the intake process if they are in a romantic relationship. If clients are in such a relationship, counselors should explore how that relationship is affecting their transition to adulthood. Romantic relationships may not be salient for some youth, for example, those whose relationship is more casual or short-term in nature, but it may be an important part of the transition process for others. It will also be beneficial to assess the quality of the relationship as part of the decision about whether to include romantic partners in the counseling process. There may be situations where including them will change the focus of the counseling itself. For example, if a couple's relationship is characterized by high levels of distrust, hostility, or abusive power dynamics, working on those issues may be necessary before that relationship can be used to facilitate other therapeutic goals.

For youth in committed romantic relationships, the separation between individual and couple issues appears to be artificial: both members of a romantic partnership engage around projects, even when that project is explicitly focused on one member's future. For example, finding work for one partner is something that the couple as a whole is engaged in, because it affects both their lives. Consequently, as Domene and colleagues (2010) recommend, for youth whose romantic relationships are functional, and a salient part of their lives, it may be wise to engage both members of the couple in counseling, even for clients who are normally treated on an individual basis, such as university students seeking career counseling. Moreover, the nature of the projects found in Domene et al.'s study suggests that separating out one counseling issue from other aspects of clients' lives may run contrary to youths' holistic, interconnected conceptualization of how issues such as career and family relationships or health and finances fit together in their lives. This is especially true given the underlying importance that maintaining and further pushing along the romantic relationship appears to have within the range of transition to adulthood projects that couples are engaged in.

In premarital and other forms of relationship counseling, it would be quite natural for transition problems such as work and finances, separation from family of origin, and deciding where to live to be addressed and dealt with by the couple together (e.g., Berger & Hannah, 1999; Bierman, 2008). A similar approach could be used by practitioners working in traditionally individual-oriented settings, such as university counseling centers or career counseling agencies. For youth in romantic relationships who are clearly committed to working together to achieve the transition to adulthood, adopting a relational approach where the couple as a whole is the client, will improve the likelihood that both partners' needs and perspectives are accurately understood by the counselor (as opposed to having one partner interpret what is going on for the other). Romantic partners can also function as an important source of emotional and practical support for each other. Finally, working with both romantic partners would also allow a counselor to draw from the rich literature on effective marriage and family therapy interventions, in order to use the couple's mutual relationship itself as a tool in the therapeutic process. Finally, the benefits of working with both members of couple on some transition to adulthood issues should be self-evident. These presenting problems include struggles with work–family balance; conflict between partners' different expectations for future; and finding a career that

fits with the clients' other high priority life roles (e.g., timing of having children, division of parenting responsibilities, desire to be close to families of origin).

Case Study

The concepts discussed in this chapter are well illustrated by a case from Domene and colleagues' (2010) study of the joint career projects of young adult couples. Jim and Diane (pseudonyms have been used throughout) are full-time students at a university in Canada, although they are both American citizens of European ancestry. Diane is 21 years old and in the third year of a 4-year degree in psychology, while Jim is 22 years old and in his final year of study in the same program as Diane. Neither of them is employed during the school year, but in the summer, Jim works for a painting company and Diane works as a construction laborer. Both of them are planning to pursue graduate studies in psychology after completing their current degrees. This couple met at university and, at the beginning of their research involvement, had been married for 3 months, with no children. They are sharing a rental home with two other students, a situation that no longer suits their needs. By the end of their research involvement, Jim and Diane reported making substantial progress on their transition project, but also characterized it as ongoing, with more work to be done. For example, they described the success of having found several schools with suitable graduate programs for both of them, but also described the future goals of applying to get into those schools and obtaining financial support in order to pursue their educational aspirations.

Jim and Diane were dealing with a range of transition to adulthood issues over the course of their research involvement, including how to effectively manage their limited finances; figuring out where to live in the future; deciding what to do about pursuing further education, for example, Jim completing his degree a year before Diane and finding programs in a single geographic location that fit both their interests and adjusting to married life. The topic of having children was not a focus for Diane and Jim, being something that they envisioned for their more distant future together. Encapsulating their various transition goals was the joint project that they described to the researchers, "Actively planning for our life together after we finish our current degrees."

This project reflects both romantic relationship as the goal of a couple's joint project (adjusting to life together as a married couple) and their romantic relationship as the unit in which other transition goals are pursued (planning together to achieve various desired outcomes regarding finances, living arrangements, and graduate school). Indeed, for Jim and Diane, the distinction between romantic relationship as outcome and romantic relationship as process was not salient: For them, focusing on the quality of their mutual relationship was completely intertwined with focusing on the other identified issues, because they viewed their relationship as a central part of how to manage finances, figuring out where to live, and pursuing further education.

This couple's transition project was supported by range of actions over the course of their research involvement, including looking at potential new homes together, supporting each others' work-related decisions in the face of negative feedback from extended family, helping each other look for work, searching for and evaluating graduate school options together, and openly resolving interpersonal conflict. One specific example of Jim and Diane's project-related action was a situation that both of them recorded in their written monitoring logs. As Jim described it, "Diane wrote me a letter about how she was frustrated with our finance situation. She felt that she wasn't involved enough and wanted to make some changes." This led to what Diane called "a discussion/argument about finances and money," because "I felt that I didn't have any say in the process and that the way I was used to doing things was wrong. I was hoping to be able to gain more of a say in how and where our money was going and just to be more comfortable." This conversation precipitated some change, as Jim stated, "We sat down after work and talked about it and came up with a system that worked for both of us." However, from Diane's perspective, the solution was only partially satisfying for her:

> It still isn't completely resolved, but he is informing me more about money issues and listened to what categories needed to be considered and just what my needs were. The process feels a little more balanced between the two of us. I wish there was some way that our two ways of spending money (cash vs. debit) but it looks like debit just makes Jim uncomfortable so I will just continue to try to adjust to carrying cash.

In this example, several actions were undertaken to resolve conflict with the transition to adulthood issue of learning to manage finances. The role of emotion in the process was also clear. First, Diane's feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction precipitated the initial notification about the problem; that is, writing and reading the letter. Second, the couple's concern and love for each other motivated their action of attempting to resolve the conflict through discussion. Finally, Diane's additional individual action of adjusting her own preferred style of money management ("I will just continue to try to adjust to carrying cash") also reflected her feelings toward her partner.

Although Diane and Jim did not seek counseling as part of their joint transition project; it is entirely conceivable that they could have approached their university counseling services for assistance with career planning, both in terms of finding post-graduation employment and pursuing graduate education. Working with both of them together as clients would allow their career counselor to apply a range of interventions in a safe, therapeutic environment, which would otherwise not be possible. For example, having Jim ask Diane for her perspective on his areas of strength and weakness could be useful for resolving his uncertainty about what area of psychology would be best for him to pursue. If they lacked information about what it is required of students in different kinds of graduate programs, or how to obtain financing for graduate education, having both Diane and Jim participate in the information search would not only be more efficient, but may also bring to awareness any conflicting preferences they may have. Additionally, the benefits of working with both members of this couple on their concerns about work–family balance, conflict

between different partner's expectations for future, or finding a career that fits with the client's other high priority life roles, for example, timing of having children and division of parenting responsibilities; desire to be close to families of origin, should be self-evident.

Overall, the case of Diane and Jim provides a concrete example of the ways that romantic partners, particularly those with relatively low levels of conflict and high levels of commitment to maintaining their relationship, can engage together during the transition to adulthood. Although they are already married, which is somewhat unusual for 20 and 21 year olds in contemporary industrialized societies (Arnett, 2006), the transition issues that they were working on are ones that are typical for couples of their age, regardless of whether the romantic relationship takes the specific form of serious dating, cohabitation, or marriage. More importantly, the way that Jim and Diane engaged with each other demonstrates that youth in romantic relationships can formulate transition projects, and take joint action to achieve these projects. Their actions may not have always been completely successful, but there was a clear commitment to continue to work together to achieve their goals.

Chapter 12
Transition in the Context of Disability

> Danni has special needs so I have been thinking about transitioning to adulthood since he was six years old, you know. . ., I always needed to provide him with a lot of guidance and special interventions. As far as transitioning to adulthood, it started with transitioning to independence and making a lot of difficult choices . . . setting him up to make choices is really important and teaching him life skills is really important. We have done a lot of things that other kids, I think haven't done and um . . . like . . . what am I thinking of? . . . Going to see a dietician and an occupational therapist. Danni is really academic and he really gobbles up information but he doesn't necessarily put it into practice. . ., also practicing and learning social skills . . . also Danni follows the straight and narrow and I try to expand his way of thinking. Like, offer some possibilities. He tends to see things as . . . this is the way it always is and always will be. So I always try and offer . . . maybe some options. . .

Mother of an 18-Year-Old Son with Developmental Disabilities

This brief quote portrays the thoughts and feelings of a mother regarding the ongoing task of guiding her son with disabilities toward adulthood by thinking about and promoting transitioning outcomes. The quote also signals important dimensions of parent–youth individual and joint actions in the context of the transition process considered in the current chapter. Parents are actively involved in the transition to adulthood process of their youth. Parents' actions do not occur in a vacuum rather, parents and youth are engaged in day-to-day goal-directed behaviors over time envisioning an end-result of adult life for the youth. These behaviors have meaning for both parents and youth, and the meaning often expands to include outside professionals in facilitating the transitioning process. All persons involved impact the formation of goals and the carrying out of transitioning steps.

In the current chapter, we seek to better understand the transition to adulthood processes for youth with disabilities or chronic illnesses using an action-theoretical lens. The action-theoretical framework (Valach, Young, et al., 2002) and its related action-project method are proposed as a heuristic for researching transition to adulthood among youth with disabilities or chronic illness and for understanding parent–youth related processes over time in the context of other life processes. Our view is that researching this transition using action theory provides more adequate

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understanding of the complexity and intentionality of parents and youths' joint actions and projects.

The Transition to Adulthood Among Youth with Disabilities or Chronic Illness

The transition to adulthood is a crucial phase in the life of any individual and it proves difficult, uncertain, and stressful for a large share of the general population of youth (Arnett, 2004; Furstenberg et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, then, it is an especially challenging one for young people who have added barriers such as chronic illnesses or developmental disabilities (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005b). First, youth with chronic illness or developmental disabilities often have limited skills that may prevent opportunities available to others and hence require significantly more effort to maximize their possibilities (Bryan, Stiles, Bursetein, Ergul, & Chao, 2007). For instance, physical disabilities and cognitive impairments may rule out some appealing occupations (Levine & Wagner, 2005). Also, it generally holds true that the type and severity of the disability affects the way youth will transition (Blum, 2005). Second, youth with chronic illness or developmental disabilities need to negotiate a delicate balance between their illness-related needs and limitations and working through normative developmental tasks (Weissberg-Benchell, Wolpert, & Anderson, 2007). For example, coping with diabetes might conflict with issues related to identity and psychosocial development (Luyckx et al., 2008; Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Third, this group of youth has the added burden of performing/accomplishing tasks that most youth during the transition to adulthood do not face. For example, these youth might need to inquire about medical services or devices to assist them with daily tasks (Blum, 2005). Finally, the period marking the end of adolescence represents the end of a structured schedule as well as loss of support from intervention systems that had provided benefits to them as youth (Blum, White, & Gallay, 2005). In Western society, this time is typically accompanied by rising expectations for work and independent living (Winn & Hay, 2009).

Transition Contexts

Research on the transition to adulthood of youth with chronic illness or disabilities is often framed within the context of educational transition services. Educational transition services focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the youth with a disability to facilitate the youth's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (Department of Education, in Betz, 2007). Transition for

youth with disability also occurs within the context of the health-care transition, that is, from youth-centered pediatric to adult health-care settings.

Youth with disabilities also face psychosocial developmental tasks associated with the transition to adulthood, such as, achieving psychological maturity, the establishment of a sense of identity (Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2008), increasing independence and personal autonomy (Tuchman, Slap, & Britto, 2008), and changing parent–youth relationship (Giarelli, Bernhardt, Mack, & Pyeritz, 2008). Overall, the transition-to-adulthood period for youth with disabilities presents unique complexities and significant challenges that are important for researchers to work at understanding and communicating to those involved.

Indeed numerous studies have shown that youth with chronic illness or disabilities experience significant difficulty making a successful transition into adult life (e.g., Getzel & deFur, 1997; Levine & Wagner, 2005; Winn & Hay, 2009; White & Gallay, 2005). Furthermore, they achieve limited outcomes as they leave high school and attempt to access adult health care, independent living, post-secondary education, employment, and adult community services (Blum, 2005; Levine & Wagner, 2005; Thompson, McGrew, Johnson, & Bruininks, 2000; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006).

Understanding the Parental Role

The transition to adulthood has also been identified as one the most challenging and stressful periods for the parents of youth with disabilities (Green, 2002, 2004; Rapanaro, Bartu, & Lee, 2008). Previous research looking at parental internal experiences demonstrated that caring for a youth with disabilities and executing transition-related requirements have affected parents' emotional and cognitive experience. Parents of youth with chronic illness or disabilities experienced greater concerns related to the transition than parents of healthy and typically developing youth (Conti-Ramsden, Botting, & Durkin, 2008; Glidden & Jobe, 2007). These parents, in addition to managing the chronic or daily demands of caregiving, are confronted with a range of challenging events related to their youths' transition to adulthood. For example, the need to realistically assess the youths' capacity to live an unassisted life in the future (Green, 2004) and to cope with or manage a potential lack of services or the quality of service, youth's well-being, and independence issues (Baxter, Cummins, & Polak, 1995; Blacher, 2001; Levitas & French-Gilson, 2001; Nuehring & Sitlington, 2003; Rapanaro et al., 2008). Previous research indicated that parents experience concerns across a wide range of transition domains including their youth's ability to function independently, and the need for ongoing care and assistance throughout adulthood (Cooney, 2002; Jordan & Dunlap, 2001; Schneider, Wedgewood, Llewellyn, & McConnell, 2006; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001). In addition, parents reported concerns related to their youths' opportunity for socialization, the availability of community resources (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2008; Glidden & Jobe, 2007), and vocational options (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2008;

Cooney, 2002). Moreover, findings have indicated that parental concerns are closely associated with the level of youth's independence and social skills (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2008).

Considering the process of moving from pediatric care to adult health-care settings, parents found it harder to cope with the transition than their youth (Boyle, Farukhi, & Nosky, 2001; Geerts, Van de wiel, & Tamminga, 2008; Moon et al., 2009; Tuchman et al., 2008). Parents are challenged by the unfamiliarity of the adult health system and a new and potentially less central role, which in turn contributes to parents' feelings of powerlessness (Cooney, 2002). Parents also report being concerned about their youth's ability to care for their illness independently and their own ability to sustain their involvement in their youths' care (Boyle et al., 2001; Geerts et al., 2008). In addition, parents report concern over the process of establishing relationships with new health providers (Moons et al., 2009). In summary, parents of youth with disabilities or chronic illness cope with a multitude of issues many of which are related to the tasks of facilitating the transition to adulthood.

Parental Involvement as a Joint Process

It has been suggested that the role of parents throughout transition to adulthood is one of many factors found to enhance youth with disabilities transitioning outcomes (Galambos, Magill-Evans, & Darrah, 2008; Kraemer, McIntyre, & Blacher, 2003; Newman, 2005; Pascall & Hendey, 2004; Tuchman et al., 2008). For example, parents' knowledge of adult services, parents' involvement in transition planning, and family coping predicted young adult quality of life during transition (Kraemer et al., 2003). Parents indicate that they are deeply involved in their youths' transition planning from arranging for their youths' job placement, managing relevant support services, to facilitating the development of their youths' social and life skills planning (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004; Cooney, 2002; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Lehmann, 1998; Lehmann, Bassett, & Sands, 1999; Timmons, Whitney-Thomas, McIntyre, Butterworth, & Allen, 2004; Morningstar, 1997). In addition, parents of youth with disabilities are more actively involved in supporting their youths' educational development both at home and at school compared to parents of youth in the general population (Newman, 2005).

A potential conflict or strain exists between high parental involvement and the developmental demand of increased youth independence. These competing tensions can produce dilemmas for both parents and youth. For example, parents report experiencing predicaments regarding their goal of creating opportunities for independence for the young adult and at the same time wanting to ensure that health and safety needs are met. Parents also identify inherent conflict in the dual goals of helping to maximize the young adult's growth and potential at the same time as demonstrating unconditional acceptance (Thorin, Yovanoff, & Irvin, 1996).

An important theoretical contribution to understanding the transition to adulthood in the families in question comes in the work of Blacher (2001) who proposed

a theoretical model for understanding family well-being during the transition to adulthood in young adults with developmental disabilities. In her model, Blacher emphasized the importance of family involvement as contributing to the youth's transition success, that is, for residential placement, job opportunity, socialization, and quality of life, and to family well-being. She suggested that parental involvement include behavioral, cognitive, and emotional elements and should be examined over time during the transition. Based on her theoretical model, Kraemer and Blacher (2001) developed a self-report questionnaire that assessed parents' level of involvement and opportunities to be involved in the transition planning process. Items assess the kinds of involvement parents actually took in transition planning for their young adults, such as participation in transition planning meetings, conversations with teachers, and observing potential vocational placements. Items also assessed degree of parental worry about various aspects of transition such as where their young adults will work, the possibility of community living, and access to general social opportunities. The complexity of parental involvement has previously been understood through an individual lens, neglecting the ongoing joint actions that construct the goals, strategies, and social meaning of the transition to adulthood with this population.

Studies on parental role and involvement emphasized its positive effect on the transition to adulthood among youth with chronic illness or disabilities. Likewise, these studies underline the importance of understanding what parents are doing in their day-to-day lives with their youth, as well as parents' perceptions of their involvement and emotional responses to it. At the same time, the current research tends to rely on parental and/or youth retrospectives accounts. There is little research into this complex transition process that accounts for and describes parents' and youths' simultaneous and ongoing behaviors. Research on roles and stressors examines their impact on behavior from the perspective of variables or factors. There is little research that examines and describes the formation and organization of adult and youth transition behavior as being organized around individual and jointly constructed goals. The current chapter is framed within a constructionist view of human behavior that includes a theory of action as an organizing construct accounting for human agency as it applies both to parents and youth at the youth transition to adulthood.

The Value of Contextual Action Theory

The contextual action-theory framework addresses several key limitations in the current literature on the transition to adulthood for youth with disability or chronic illness. Most research is typically retrospective and addresses one or two facets of the transition, for example, perceptions or emotions. Youth and parent perspectives are considered separately. Research on the transition to adulthood for youth with disability or chronic illness has neglected to focus on both the parent-youth relationship and the parent-youth joint processes over time. The action-theory framework

can account for ongoing manifest behaviors, internal processes, social meaning, and communication processes as they unfold within parent–youth dyads that are organized around the transition to adulthood (Young et al., 2008). Retrospective and qualitative accounts exist but without a guiding theoretical framework they tend to offer limited or incomplete understandings of the complexity of joint transition process in the context of disability.

The action-theory perspective focuses on the central role that goals and intentionality play in organizing transition-related actions and in impacting the meaning constructed to make sense of the processes that constitute the transition to adulthood. The following case example offers detailed description and action-theoretical analyses examining the transition to adulthood for Ben, an 18-year-old young man, and his mother Sue who is highly involved in his transition process. Ben presents with chronic illness and resulting disabilities. This case captures how joint processes are negotiated in an ongoing manner and how social meaning, goal formation, and emotion management issues are constructed within Ben and Sue's relationship. The names have been chosen to enhance readability and are fictitious.

Case Example

Ben and his mother Sue are both persons from an Asian background. Ben has had Lupus for the last 4 years, which resulted in physical and cognitive impairments. Lupus is a chronic, autoimmune, inflammatory disease that can affect any organ in the body and in a pattern that varies greatly from person to person. Ben has completed grade 12 in a special high school program and will continue his studies for another year. He lives at home with his mother and grandmother. The father lives out of the country for work-related reasons and visits on an infrequent basis. The mother, Sue, and the father operate a home-based business, and Sue devotes much of her time to taking care of Ben.

Sue's perception of Ben's transition to adulthood has been profoundly shaped by the chronic illness and the limitations it has placed on his life. She is concerned that Ben's ability to function independently in the outside world will always be constrained by his physical and cognitive impairments. As a result, Sue expects that Ben's reliance on her, his father and the community to assist him will be permanent. Ben views on becoming an adult centered on the idea of becoming independent, which he defined as doing things on his own, taking care of himself, and living separately from his parents.

The case's transition project tentatively identified from their initial joint conversation, through subsequent analysis by the researchers, and through a verification discussion with mother and son was identified as, "Acknowledging and addressing the limitations resulting from Ben's illness and trying to develop coping mechanisms to help Ben gain new skills and independence." Over the course of involvement in the research Ben and his mother engaged in activities and conversations that centered on Ben's career planning and Ben becoming more independent as seen from the definition above.

The project was observed to be mutual and cooperative. Both Sue and Ben engaged willingly and demonstrated a strong and unwavering commitment to working together to try to ensure the youth learned to manage his life as independently as possible given his limitations. Although characterized by mutual engagement, the joint project was led by Sue. Sue dictated the functional steps for attaining their goals. She regularly initiated conversations related to the transitions to adulthood with topics such as meeting new people and exploring future work possibilities. As part of these discussions, Sue consistently had to cope with Ben's short attention span and language disabilities. For example, in the initial joint conversation she read out the list of topics from the research protocol (leisure, work, relationships, education, and lifestyle) one by one throughout the conversation. She introduced each topic with a brief explanation, asking questions, providing information and explanations, sharing her thoughts, making suggestions, and educating Ben about various topics such as what would be expected of him when he gets a job. Furthermore, Sue persisted in educating Ben about the daily tasks of living. As an example in Sue and Ben's final joint conversation, they talked about practical issues related to Ben becoming independent, including the skills required to take care of himself at home, at school, and in the workplace.

Sue: . . .And the other thing I warned you about – management.
Ben: Management?
Sue: Managing your money. Managing your money. You save your money.
Ben: Yeah saving. Saving my money. Yeah. Don't spend too. . .
Sue: Spend what you should spend.
Ben: Yeah. Spend on what I should spend and don't waste it.

In the self-confrontation, she elaborated:

> up to now he still got some allowance in his wallet. And for the money, he saved it and put it into the bank. He's still going out to most places with me, so I just do not have the chance to let him learn how to use the money to pay for what to buy. So I think that the next step is to let him to handle his money and make related decisions. Normally I think youth at his age already are handling their money . . . I think now he can start – I still don't know yet for what . . . I should start let him handle his own money.

In addition, related to the goal of making wise decisions, the son reflected on his learning experience:

> I saw the movie Shrek, and I really liked a song, and then I told my mom I want to buy the soundtrack. And then I bought the soundtrack, but I . . . I only liked that song. So mom said, so next time I should think about if I can get the song somewhere else, cuz the soundtrack costs like, how much? 12, 14 dollar, right? So I should think about first of all, is it worth it to buy it? . . . Mom basically saying, if I want that thing, don't buy it right away. Think about it if it's worth it. If I really need it first.

Sue also put considerable effort into directing Ben's behaviors by introducing discussions, making suggestions, and encouraging Ben to increase his independence level by taking responsibilities and managing basic tasks on his own without her help. She was vigilant in looking for opportunities to introduce practical, adulthood training, tasks for her son, for example, encouragement to make wise decisions

regarding the purchase of products, to use his alarm clock to wake up, to write down his appointments in a calendar, take his medications, and do his homework. At the same she monitored his accomplishments and got involved if needed. In addition, the pair also jointly practiced new skills such as the completion of household chores and having Ben give Sue directions on how to get to certain places.

Sue and Ben also made plans and practiced skills in the context of Ben's upcoming transition to adult health care. Primarily, this meant Ben communicating with his doctor and professionals on his own and taking responsibility to remember his medical appointments. Sue chose to monitor Ben as he enacted these independence-producing tasks, stepping in when she felt there was a need for intervention.

Sue: Ben asked me about his coming medical appointment, I told him to keep a calendar and mark down his upcoming appointments. I think he managed it quite well, yet he still sometimes forgot to watch over the calendar. . .

At the same time, because Ben is staying in the same medical facility interacting with his familiar professionals, this is not a current major concern for either Ben or Sue.

Ben cooperated with his mother in the conversations; he was open to her initiations and was willing to put forth efforts to implementing her suggestions. He listened and answered his mother's questions and statements. He expressed agreement and understanding to his mother. At times, Ben raised relevant topics that were of particular interest to him such as formulating his plans when he finished school, namely, his future career. Overall, Ben presented appreciation of his mother's experience and knowledge, and his mother's assistance and willingness to provide support.

In terms of career planning, Sue and Ben spent time exploring Ben's interests in both computers and graphic design. They discussed how he might include his interest in planning his future career. Furthermore, they examined whether these options would work in light of his limitations. For example, Sue talked to Ben about developing his artistic talents, validating his strengths while also openly discussing his limitations so as not to give him false hope. Ben expressed understanding about the need to think about his limitations when considering a future career.

Ben: Some job that I can do is the job, like a sit down job. But also, I don't have a long attention span. I can't do a full time job. Full time job is like from 8:00 till 5:00 or so. Yeah, if it's from 8:00 to 5:00, if it's sit down job, office work. I can't face the computer for that many hours. So mom is saying, better off for me to have part time job. (From Ben's self-confrontation interview)

Ben: after I finish school, where am I gonna go? My mom said that in [names rehabilitation center], they have like a . . . work training program. They will give me some vocational training. Yeah, cuz I'm a unique person. I got a leg problem and which I can't stand long. Which many jobs that other kids can do . . . I can't do those jobs.

This case identified Ben's strengths, passions and limitations and attempts to utilize these to organize short- and long-term vocational career goals. The fact that Ben had developed specific computer-related aptitudes became a way to set specific goals to organize both his leisure and career planning time with the goal of developing a level of independent functioning. The goals are jointly organized and the steps include Sue's encouragement and verbal/organizational guidance with Ben's receptivity and willingness to practice the specific targets of computer use and attempting to increase the length of time he can focus/concentrate.

Simultaneous and interdependent with the transition project was an identifiable parenting project for Sue. This project related to Sue's tasks of coping with the changes that have taken place since Ben's brain injury, both in her relationship with Ben and in her life as his primary caregiver. Throughout the study, Sue reported working to maintain a positive attitude in light of the challenges. Overall, her approach to Ben's illness was to maintain a realistic but positive outlook by acknowledging his limitations and capitalizing on his strengths. At the same time, she expressed her frustrations and concerns related to determining how she could best "parent" Ben. She stated that a concern she held was that Ben did not "think deeply about his future." He did not offer many ideas or show much stamina for conversation or focused activities. Ben demonstrated limited ability to express his thoughts using language so it was difficult to have a conversation with him. Ben also tended not to remember his mother's suggestions or follow through on them despite best efforts for planning. Sue reported it to be very difficult to obtain Ben's cooperation and participation in helping him in the transition to adulthood. She clearly viewed Ben's health problems, cognitive and physical limitations as significant barriers to his transition. For example, in the final self-confrontation, Sue expressed her frustration regarding Ben's need for assistance and her goal for him to become more independent:

> Although he can wake up, but – but when he prepares to go, to leave the home for school or any place, he always will still be a little bit late and also always asking me, this habit . . . He just relies on me and my directions . . . But I ask him why he always asks me when should we leave? . . . So I just tell him you need to start make a decision. Need to plan what things he needs to prepare for going out and what time should he leave. He needs to know that, without asking me what is good.

Sue's emotional investment in Ben's transition to adulthood characterized her parenting project. Her parental investment was considerable and manifest in almost continual awareness and planning for transition opportunities. Due to her high emotional investment, she also felt compelled to keep high degree of monitoring of her son. She worked hard not to allow this monitoring to interfere with facilitating transition opportunities. A task for Sue was to self-manage her own emotions in such a way that minimized their impact on the transition project. Sue balanced this with monitoring Ben's activities so that no potential harm could arise as a result of him taking responsibility for his actions. Sue also acknowledged experiencing periods of anxiety and confusion about how best to support Ben and whether her current efforts were sufficient.

For this case, there appeared to be several structural supports and resources needed to carry out the project and help it progress. Sue expressed strong commitment to finding resources to bring them closer to a "solution." The most salient resource explicitly identified by the mother was the collaboration with professionals. Sue regularly communicated with Ben's doctors and other professionals such as a speech language pathologist and occupational therapist to try to adequately determine Ben's limitations in order to gain a better idea of how much to let him do on his own and what to expect for his future. Moreover, it was apparent that some of the transition-related goals as well as the functional steps in order attain those goals were co-constructed with professionals.

> He also regularly forgets to take his medication, which I or his care worker must remind him to do. The nurse suggested that I will give him some paper to write down his medication, and in this way, to remind himself to take and then he needs also to cross [off] … all the medications, meaning he has taken it. This is the way that he trains himself, how to independently, to handle his medication. But whenever he comes home (laughs) he will not do it himself … I will try to help him to write it down. But … I probably will need to also remind him.

At the end of the study, Sue viewed the transition project as largely unchanged. Ben's level of independence remained the same with some minor observable changes such as Ben waking up on his own and completing some chores. Sue described that the transition to adulthood felt slow. The project was likely to continue as the mother continued to facilitate Ben's independence while maintaining what she perceived as necessary involvement. At the close of the study, Ben reported feeling optimistic that some progress had taken place. He identified feeling happy about achieving specific tasks on his own such as managing his weekly activities using a calendar, waking up on his own in the morning using an alarm clock, and delivering information to his doctor on his own.

Discussion

In the current chapter we sought to use action theory and the action-project method to elucidate the joint actions and projects of a parent and youth with a disability and related chronic illness. In the case we saw how the mother, Sue, had significant influence on the transition-related goals. At the same time, her son Ben regularly expressed his appreciation for his mother's efforts and demonstrated collaboration and joint engagement at the functional step level. The jointness of this project was evidenced in the ongoing process completing specific tasks in order to help Ben gain the necessary skills for making successful transition to adulthood as delineated by his level of independence. As mentioned, Ben felt positive about improving his daily responsibility for his own actions. Sue, although able to acknowledge this, appeared to be more focused on outcome goals and her role in helping Ben achieve them. Furthermore, the mother's emotional experience as related to the transition process revealed mixed positive and negative emotions that both motivated and informed her actions.

Parental adjustment and coping within the context of transition to adulthood with youth who have a disability or chronic illness have several unique aspects. In some cases, parents are faced with the reality they might live in a dependent or caregiving relationship for their entire lives. This, in turn, reflects the potential of the transition project becoming a long-term career. In action-theoretical terms, career is understood as a long-term and complex series of actions organized around a goal or series of goals. Action theory's conception of non-vocational career offers an important lens with which to view the transition process as it allows for multiple transition episodes over long period of time. For example, a youth may develop several skills related to independence, live for many years at a semi-independent level of functioning and then years later, together with parents, have to make provisions when faced with the limitations of old age. In one case, a mother remarked that, "when I think about it, I have been planning for the transition process since I learned about my son's disability, early in his life."

Action theory's conception of career appears similar to work by Seligman and Darling (1997), who proposed a family career model of the adjustment to the presence of a youth with a disability. According to this model, parents tend to proceed through different stages of adaptation corresponding to stages of the youth's lifecycle. When the child reaches adolescence, parents reenter a stage of exploration as they begin to envision and plan for the youth's impending adulthood. If appropriate answers and solutions are forthcoming, parents enter a final stage of normalization.

Implications of Action-Theoretical Lens

The use of action theory in research examining transition among youth with disabilities or chronic illnesses represents a shift in epistemology (Young et al., 2005). Moving the focus away from transition outcomes and causal explanations, action theory offers a practical and theoretically grounded description of intentional joint processes at different levels of action, including social meaning, internal processes, communication, and manifest behaviors. This shift illustrates an alternative integrative approach to investigating previously examined concepts such as parents' role, perceptions, concerns, and involvement as related to their youth's transition to adulthood in a framework that allows each of these concepts to be considered simultaneously.

As demonstrated in the current case and emphasized previously, parents play a significant role in youth with chronic illness and developmental disabilities transition to adulthood (e.g., Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). Action theory conceives of parental involvement in the transition process from the perspective of joint project. Both parent and youth are active agents engaging in the process of transition, contributing to the construction of goals, and utilizing strategies to achieve their goals (Young & Valach, 2004). Identifying parent and youth's individual and joint goals and subsequent functional steps offers important insight into the complexity

of parental involvement in the transition to adulthood process, operating concurrently in different domains of transition such as work or vocational pursuit, gaining independence, and health-care transition. In the case example, it was evident how different domains were linked to each other. For example, the construction of goals and functional steps related to Ben's skills and level of independence were operating in the context of Ben's vocational pursuit and the transition to adult health. These same goals were operating both in the context of Sue's parenting project and potentially, although not explored, her identity project. Moreover, different domains might become increasingly important at different transition points. From the case example one can see that Ben's approaching his high school graduation acted to steer major goals and joint actions focusing Ben's post-secondary options and vocational interests.

The transition to adulthood manifests across multiple domains and requires a variety of skills. The mother and son put effort into developing independence and related skills that functioned in service of transition within educational settings, health-care settings, and work-vocational pursuits. The action-theory framework provided a unique lens within which to understand how Ben and Sue formed and enacted their transition goals and steps. The action-project method helped both Ben and Sue understand their thoughts and feelings related to their transition-related actions. It also helped them make sense of what they were trying to do and why they were trying to do it. Both mother and son, through all facets of the process, were invited to understand how they conceptualized the transition to adulthood and to evaluate and understand their efforts on an ongoing basis.

Reconceptualizing Parent Involvement

Parental involvement has previously been understood as the parent role in specific tasks related to the youth's transition planning (e.g., meeting with the teacher, exploring vocational opportunities). Blacher (2001) examined the quantity of parental assistance for a specific number of tasks of transition planning and associated concerns. From an action-theory perspective, this does not adequately address the complexity of the ongoing joint processes that constitute the meaning of involvement. This becomes especially poignant when considering the interdependency of other coexistent life-projects and their impact on the joint action processes of the transition project for youth with disability and/or chronic illness.

The dyadic level of analysis taken in the action-project method gives important weighting to the youth's goals, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As demonstrated in the case example, the son remained involved with his mother by regularly showing appreciation for his mother's efforts to facilitate his transition and indicated interest in developing his self-management skills by attempting to act on her directions, knowledge, and guidance. He understood her involvement as meaningful and this seemed to energize his involvement. The son agreed to participate with the mother's plans both in relation to his own goals of becoming an adult and to please

his mother. From the mother's perspective, her involvement with the son was characterized by ongoing transition-related foresight, continual offering of guidance, providing information, education, and initiating skill practice. Her key functional step or strategy was to design opportunities that would enable the son to practice his skills and increase his independence level. The mother was motivated by her son's involvement and emotional signals that the tasks had value.

A variety of professionals are involved in the co-construction of joint projects that focused on the promotion of youth skills as related to transition-to-adulthood outcomes and in constructing an understandable parental role in the transition process. In other words, professionals guide parents' functional steps in achieving various goals and support parents' coping process by providing, for example, information and emotional encouragement. Indeed, previous literature indicates that quality of relationships between families and professionals is a key factor in affecting families involvement in transition planning (DeFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Nuehring & Sitlington, 2003; Stoner, Angell, House, & Bock, 2007). Following the case example, we suggest extending notions of the parent–professional relationship to one that focuses on parent–professional-youth co-construction of meaningful processes and outcomes through short-term joint actions and midterm projects.

The Degree of Joint Involvement

It is our assumption that joint involvement is dependent on type of disability and the skill level of the youth. For example, in cases where there would be significant cognitive impairment, the parent would tend to take more responsibility for setting the goals and guiding the transition process. The parent would determine the projects and the youth would be brought in at the functional level. In other words, the parent constructs the meaning of the transition. Where there is little or no cognitive impairment, the construction of meaning would be a more jointly held process within confines. As stated by Blum (2005), the type and severity of the disability affects the way youth transitions. This issue should be explored in future studies by using action-project method to examine the transition to adulthood among youth with different chronic illness or developmental disabilities, for example, exploring the transition to adulthood among youth with Type 1 diabetes.

Emotional Processes

The current case provides evidence that emotions have important role in parent–youth joint actions (Young, Paseluikho, et al., 1997). The mother's emotional investment in the son's transition to adulthood characterized her parenting project and is a specific function in guiding and directing the intensity and regularity of her actions. A task for this mother was to self-manage her own emotions such as frustrations and concerns about her son's abilities and progress or lack thereof. The

mother regulated her emotions in such a way that this minimized their impact on her motivated participation in the transition project. Much of the previous research has explored parents' reported concerns and challenges in regards to their youth's transition to adulthood and ignored the way parents' emotions are embedded and operate in self-regulation and interpersonal regulation with their youth. Lack of progress in the joint project or conflict between goals and functional steps can increase parental stress and feeling of powerless. In the current case, the mother's perception, at times, that the project was not productive, provoked her to question her ability to fulfill her role in supporting her son in the transition and to question her parenting, leading to feelings of anxiety and doubt. This understanding can guide health-care professionals to offer more insightful and effective support in guiding youth with chronic illness and their families by attending to the joint goals and resolving existing discrepancies.

Focused and Diffuse Transition Projects

Parents' strong commitment can be in the service of a "focused" project that is, being well defined, having explicit goals and congruent functional steps (Young et al., 2005). It seems that parental concerns and worries with regard to the adult life of their youth with disability and the associate challenges increase parents' commitment to pursue their goals, which include investment of time and efforts in working with their youth on skills development (Zaidman-Zait & Young, 2008). In the current case, at the meaning level, the transition project was operating under a narrow intentional framework – focusing on gaining new skills and independence while coping with the limitations resulting from the son's illness. At the functional level, the project was focused on practicing specific skills as structured tasks. The identification of projects as focused or diffused can assist counselors in guiding clients to clarify and work on agreement for goals and functional steps. Diffuse projects can be considered functional if joint goal-directed tasks working on one or two specific development-oriented skills are done in the service of several projects simultaneously.

Internal and External Resources

Relationship and relationship quality offers significant potential as a resource to sustain the transition project especially when it encounters inevitable difficulties. This is especially true when attention is paid to the developmental aspects of relationship for both parent and youth, and that relationship is treated as a meaningful and guided by process rather than outcomes goals. The parent–child relationship is also an important context for interaction (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). In the current case example the relationship acted as a resource to achieve various joint goals and to energize joint processes. Ben and Sue's warm and open relationship contributed to consistently positive interpretations of transition-related practice events as well as helping to energize joint persistence through difficult periods.

Beyond the parent–child internal resources that support the joint project, it was evident that external resources were a necessity. Similarly, Seligman and Darling (1997) highlight barriers that prevent some families from reaching this stage, including unmet financial, service, social support, or counseling needs, as well as perceived stigma, and extreme caregiving demands due to the severity of the disability. The significant role played by service providers and professionals was evident through the case example. Professionals played an important role in the construction of joint projects by providing support, offering suggestions and knowledge to both the son and his mother. Indeed, previous literature has indicated the important role of health-care providers and intervention programs at the time of transition to adulthood, especially in the context of transition to adult health-care system and from school to work. In this regard, according to action theory those contextual transitions are the "field within which action takes place" (see Graham et al., 2008). Understanding the interdependency of related actions within the field will help researchers, health-care professionals, parents, and youth in their efforts to set reasonable goals, to include the appropriate actors, and to understand the impact of interrelated life projects as they work with and against parent–youth transition projects.

Implications for Counseling Interventions

We know youth with disabilities or chronic illnesses and their families are faced with a significantly more complex process of transition to adulthood. Significant differences include the transition from child to adult-focused care and problem-solving physical and cognitive limitations as they impact work/vocational pursuits and the transition to either independent living, assisted living, or continuing to live with one's parents.

The use of action theory and the action-project method offers the potential for sophisticated therapeutic interventions designed to impact the dyadic level of action. In a sense this would fit within the realm of family therapy interventions but with a specific focus on joint goals and steps as well as individual and joint emotion regulation (see Chapter 6). Adopting family-centered practices when working with youth with disabilities and their families, professionals are often challenged by the requirement to assess families' "needs" and their "strength and resources" in a way that would be meaningful for the family (Bernheimer & Weisner, 2007). Through the use of action-project method, professionals can get useful and meaningful information from parents and their youth about their day-to-day purposeful behaviors and related internal process over time. In addition, the action-project method represents a positive psychological intervention in its focus on the goal-directed nature transition to adulthood and the accompanying steps needed to achieve these goals.

To make the intervention specific, it is conceivable that the initial meetings could act both as a process through which the transition project would be identified and a period of skill assessment for both parent and youth. Identification of skill deficits

might then lead to specific skill practice and monitoring that could happen throughout the follow-up period or perhaps through adjunct counseling sessions. Specific skills could include cognitive, behavioral, communication and emotion management skills. During this time, both parent and youth would receive important information about the relationship between individual and joint goals within the transition project. Parents would receive education about how best to act as support to their youth and how to maximize self-care when encountering the inevitable difficulties. Both parents and youth would receive education about the value of process as well as outcome goals. Inviting clients into deeper awareness of the complexity of transition processes and providing them with information about what they might expect can normalize their experience and help to support their preexisting transition projects.

It is important to acknowledge the previously described interventions would have to be carefully matched with the youth's developmental level, keeping in mind the youth's limitations both physically and cognitively. At the same time, interventions would need to be sensitive to parental openness to making changes in their approach to the developmental process, especially if it became necessary to invite parents into a process of foregrounding the youth's transition-related goals. Great care would need to be taken in order to remain focused at the joint level of functioning as the likely, and common approach would be to tailor explanation and primary intervention to the parent of the youth. An important insight comes from the case of Ben and Sue where both achieved their "goals" even though Ben's goals were more oriented to short-term daily process, and Sue's goals were primarily focused on transition outcomes. A skilled therapist would balance valuing both Ben's process outcomes and, at the same time, empowering his mother to continue to encourage and facilitate movement toward important transition outcomes. An attuned therapist will help both Ben and Sue regulate their ongoing emotions and see how emotions had the potential to both hinder and empower positive actions.

It bears mentioning that a typical context for the transition to adulthood for families where youths have disabilities or chronic illness is tied quite closely to the educational system. In the education context, it is required that every youth with a disability by the age of 16 years will have a written transition plan under the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Levine & Wagner, 2005). In developing the IEP parents, teachers, and other professionals are required to work together with the youth to map out relevant goals and steps potentially to next few years. Unfortunately, research has consistently indicated that families are too often relegated to the role of passive participants during transition planning (Defur et al., 2001; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000). Understanding the important role of parents in their youth transition process, as emphasized in the current chapter, allows professionals working with families to consider parents' vital involvement in transition to adulthood as intentional, goal-directed, and hierarchically organized system process. From the perspective of promoting families' strengths, parental projects can be viewed through a positive frame, by asking what allows parents to be motivated in their projects and to find meaning in their actions. Overall, action theory, with its inherent focus on goal-directed action, offers a unique conceptual lens and method through which to examine the interrelated nature of youth and parent joint

goals alongside the goals of both teachers and health-care professionals. This lens is invaluable in that it acknowledges the inevitable role that professionals play in this particular form of transition to adulthood.

Conclusion

Action theory and its action-project method can offer a useable approach in pediatric psychology research by fitting well with recent calls for greater attention to social ecologies and the reciprocal influence of children and families and the need to established family intervention approaches in pediatric psychology (Fiese, 2005). In addition, it represents the move toward person–family interdependent transition planning in order to better meet the needs of both parents and youth in this challenging time.

Chapter 13
Suicide in the Context of the Transition to Adulthood

For the majority of young people and their parents, the time during which youth make the transition to adulthood might prove to be, though strenuous and challenging, an enriching and happy experience. However, for a small number of youth, this period takes a disastrous turn when they consider suicide, attempt a suicide, or die in the course or as a result of a suicide action. In this chapter we present two contrasting views of suicide. The traditional view of suicide and suicide prevention in adolescence and youth is based on the probabilistic assessment of risk. In contrast, an action-theory perspective focuses on goal-directed actions, projects, and career processes of youth. The latter view allows for understanding the link between the life-limiting and life-destroying processes that suicide represents and life-enhancing processes in the lives of young people. We caution readers that it is not our intention in this chapter to provide an intervention manual for suicide prevention. However, this chapter invites counselors and others involved with young people to support the life-enhancing actions, projects, and careers in this transition and to be aware of links to possible life-detrimental, destructive, or suicidal actions and projects and clients' determination to act upon them.

An 18-year-old woman was asked a few days after overdosing about her suicide attempt:

Therapist: What would you say if someone asked you for an open and honest reason for your attempting suicide?

Client: I would say that it was because of my vocation. . . . I had been studying nursing. When it did not go, well, I dropped out of the program in February. I would have been able to continue in September. I spent the whole summer deciding whether or not I should continue. I was persuaded by others that I should start again. I knew all along that I didn't want to. But I was unable to say so. When I went back to the hospital on Monday it all started again. I realized that I didn't want to do that. I swallowed the pills in the evening and decided to give up my life.

This young person was lucky she survived. But are suicides and suicide events extremely rare events? The statistics for the United States, which are similar for many other countries, indicate that it is not such an unusual event. The American

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Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2008) reported that suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year olds. Suicidal ideation in adolescence approaches a prevalence rate of 20% (Lewinsohn, Rohde, & Seeley, 1996). Similarly, the American Association of Suicidology (2006) summarized data on completed suicides, attempts, and significant considerations of suicide among adolescents:

> Each year, there are approximately 10 youth suicides for every 100,000 youth. For every completed suicide by youth, it is estimated that 100 to 200 attempts are made. Based on the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), 8.5% of students in grades 9 through 12 reported making an attempt at suicide in the previous 12 months (11.5% female and 5.4% male). According to the YRBSS, 16.9% of students seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months and 16.5% of students made plans for an attempt (2003).

Some groups of young people are more vulnerable to suicide than others. For example, Health Canada (n.d.) reported that suicide rates for First Nations youth are five to seven times higher than for non-Aboriginal youth, and Inuit youth have rates 11 times the national average. Based on data from various US sources, Goldston and colleagues reported differential rates of suicide attempts among youth from various ethnic groups (Goldston et al., 2008). Youth who have substance abuse disorders are also seen to be at an increased risk (Ramchand, Griffin, Harris, McCaffery, & Morrel, 2008). However, these data while informative are always dependent on particular definitions of suicide and suicide attempts and demographic identification of sub-population groups. For example, in the case of sexual-minority youth, Savin-Williams (2001) found that in two particular studies measurement and methodological challenges overestimated suicide attempts in this group.

Why do young people consider suicide? Wagner (2009) identified a range of reasons, including the experience of emotional pain ranging from sadness, anxiety, disappointment, to anger, rage, and emptiness. In cases where these emotions are triggered and the youth cannot regulate them to his or her advantage, he can become absorbed in stopping the pain. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2008) identified events such as divorce, moving to a new community, pressure to succeed in school or work as well as interpersonally can intensify self-doubts and self-recriminations. Berman and colleagues summarized Mann's unpublished empirical work identifying nine reasons for dying that were considered by suicidal college students: other (retribution), unburdening others, loneliness, hopelessness, issues about self, general escape, escape from the past, escape from pain, escape responsibility (Berman, Jobes, & Silverman, 2005). Wagner summarized the reasons adolescents consider suicide in the experience of disillusionment, that is, a young person who has "lost the faith and trust in herself, others, and the future" (p. 233).

Suicidologists report in empirical studies a number of signs and signals in young people, which, when observed and taken seriously, might help prevent suicide (e.g., Berman, Jobes, & Silverman, 2005; Robbins, 1998; Wagner, 2009). These include change in eating and sleeping habits, withdrawal, violent actions, running away, drug and alcohol use, unusual neglect of personal appearance, marked personality

change, a decline in the quality of schoolwork, frequent complaints about physical symptoms often related to emotions, and loss of interest in pleasurable activities among others. A youth who is planning to die by suicide may also complain about being a bad person or feeling rotten inside, give verbal hints with statements such as: "I won't be a problem for you much longer, nothing matters," give away favorite possessions, and/or show signs of psychosis, that is, hallucinations or bizarre thoughts. Based on this list of signs of possible suicide, suicidologists have formulated risk and protective factors for suicide. The strongest risk factors for attempted suicide in youth are previous suicide attempt, depression, alcohol or drug abuse, and aggressive or disruptive behaviors.

Risk Factors

The following cultural and sociodemographic factors were found more often in suicidal adolescents: low socio-economic status, poor education and unemployment in the family, indigenous people and immigrants, low participation in society's customary activities, lack of cultural roots, and gender nonconformity and identity issues relating to sexual orientation (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Friend, & Powell, 2009; Moscicki, 1997).

The following family experiences are more common in suicidal youth: destructive family patterns and traumatic events in early childhood, parental psychopathology (Gould et al., 1998), alcohol and substance abuse, antisocial behavior in the family, a family history of suicide and suicide attempts, a violent and abusive family, poor care provided by parents/guardians, poor communication within the family, divorce, separation or death of parents/guardians, frequent moves to a different residential area, very high or very low expectations on the part of parents/guardians, parents'/guardians' inadequate or excessive authority, parents'/guardians' lack of time to observe and deal with children's emotional distress, rejection or neglect, family rigidity (Carris, Sheeber, & Howe, 1998), and an adoptive or foster family.

Specific cognitive styles and personality traits are frequently observed during adolescence, but are also associated with the risk of attempted or completed suicide: unstable mood, angry or aggressive behavior, antisocial behavior, acting-out behavior, high impulsivity, irritability, rigid thinking and coping patterns, poor problem-solving ability when difficulties arise, an inability to grasp realities, a tendency to live in an illusory world, fantasies of greatness alternating with feelings of worthlessness, a ready sense of disappointment, anxiety, feelings of inferiority and uncertainty, rejection or provocative behavior, uncertainty concerning gender identity or sexual orientation (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998), ambivalent relationships with parents, other adults, and friends.

Psychiatric disorders are also found more often in suicidal adolescents. The combination of depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior has been described as the most common antecedent of teenage suicide (Spruijt & de Goede, 1997; Weissman et al., 1999). Depressed girls withdraw and become silent, despondent, and inactive. Depressed boys tend toward disruptive and aggressive behavior and demand a great

deal of attention from their teachers and parents. However, depression is not a necessary concomitant of either suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts (Vandivort & Locke, 1979).

There is a correlation between anxiety disorders and suicide attempts in young males. Psychosomatic symptoms are also often present in young persons tormented by suicidal thoughts. One in four suicidal adolescent patients has been found to have consumed alcohol or drugs before the act. Suicide risk among anorexic girls is 20 times that for young people in general. Suicide risk is also very high among adolescents suffering from severe psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia or manic-depressive disorder. Finally, a history of single or recurrent suicide attempts is an important risk factor for suicidal behavior. Evidence suggests that risks are cumulative (King & Apter, 2003).

Current negative life events can also increase the risk of suicide. A marked susceptibility to stress, based on the above-specified cognitive style and personality traits and due to inherited genetic factors but also to family patterns and negative life stressors experienced in early life, is usually observed in suicidal children and adolescents (Beautrais, Joyce, & Mulder, 1997). This susceptibility makes it difficult to cope with negative life events adequately. Thus, suicidal behavior is often preceded by stressful life events. These events reactivate the sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair that may bring thoughts of suicide to the surface and lead to attempted suicide or suicide. However, the problem is that youths may still be suicidal even without any of these adverse conditions.

Protective Factors

The major factors that provide protection against suicidal behavior are good relationships with family members, support from family, good social skills, confidence, seeking help when difficulties arise and important choices must be made, openness to social integration through participation, and support from relevant people (Plutchik & Van Praag, 1997).

The above summary raises a number of issues. First, we realize that suicide is not uncommon among adolescents during transition to adulthood. Second, there are signs that help us identify those in need of support and treatment, and there are situational characteristics that could be seen as facilitating or triggering a suicide. Third, a series of factors have been identified which represent an elevated risk for youth to die by suicide. Fourth, there are protective factors that lower the probability of suicide. Finally, many adolescents and young adults who do not attempt or die by suicide possess such characteristics and many others who do die by suicide are neither depressive nor do they have many of these risk factors. This makes the prediction of suicide in individual cases very unstable. Wagner (2009) discussed this as the principle of multifinality and equifinality. Multifinality suggests that "a given risk condition can lead to a diversity of outcomes through its influence on various development processes across development" (p. 60). Equifinality suggests that an outcome such as a suicide attempt could result from any number of pathways. It characterizes goal-directed action.

Suicide: From Causally Determined Structural Constellation to Goal-Directed Processes

Many suicidologists treat suicide as a social fact in the same sense Durkheim (1951) described it, that is, as a quota of suicides in a society, such as number of suicides in a population of 100,000, and not necessarily as a process counselors, clinicians, or other practitioners encounter in their everyday work when meeting individual clients. We advocate the latter understanding of suicide, which means shifting from understanding suicide as a probabilistic event to seeing it an individual or joint goal-directed process. In counseling and treatment, it is not simply a matter of eliminating all suicide facilitating conditions alone in the hope that we will prevent a particular suicide.

The number of suicides per 100,000 inhabitants in a particular society is a social fact, but this fact is of little use to the counselor encountering and understanding a suicidal client. Other social processes could be studied which impact these social facts. Some psychology and counseling researchers deal with individual processes in the same way Durkheim dealt with social facts, that is, they seek to establish certain statistical regularities. Such regularities would lead to identifying laws, which are desired so much in the natural sciences. In time, psychological phenomena became equated with natural phenomena that obey natural laws. Thus, suicide came to be understood as a caused event.

The general considerations about suicide described at the beginning of this chapter provide us with a glimpse of how many authors think about suicide when they are not restricted by their theories and the desire to represent their propositions in a statistical, nomothetic way. The following quotation from the American Association of Child Psychiatry (2008) reflects this thinking: "Teenagers experience strong feelings of stress, confusion, self-doubt, . . . For some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems and stress" (p. 1). Thus, it is assumed that there is an experience of a problem, the emotional monitoring of this problem, a goal, and a means to achieve this goal which, obviously, is disastrous for the youth involved as well as their families and friends. This is a model of an action in its everyday form. In our own and many other societies people see the behavior of others and construct the social world of their own behavior in the same way; that is, they see their own and other people's behavior as a goal-directed action (Vallacher & Wenger, 1987). We suggested that this way of understanding the social world should be taken seriously by professionals and integrated into professional-scientific thinking, conceptualizing and analysis, be it in understanding suicide processes (Michel & Valach, 2001; Valach, Michel, Young, & Dey, 2002) or understanding adolescents' and parental attempts to facilitate adolescents' aims in various areas such as vocational life.

It might be helpful to remind ourselves of the differences between this approach and mainstream theorizing. The ethical argument, particularly the argument of relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Cottone, 2004) and the practical requirement of supporting clients – be it in suicide prevention, transition counseling, or psychotherapy – become the most relevant issues. It is our conviction that the action-theoretical approach is very important for counselors as it puts their situation

of dealing with clients in the centre of theorizing, empirical work, and developing counseling interventions. As counselors, we know that in order to reach clients we have to engage in joint goal-directed action and projects with them. Relationship building and developing a narrative based on interpersonal warmth and amicability in counseling must rely on clients' action-theoretical thinking. For example, the chapter authors in Dryden's (1989) edited book have shown in a variety of ways how clients and counselors use naïve theories of action in counseling. These theories include such notions as setting goals, identifying joint counselor–client goals, choosing counseling tasks, using the client's everyday language, and consolidating progress toward goals. Motto and Bostrom (2001) also argued that the best midterm and long-term suicide prevention is when clients are part of a supportive and life-enhancing relationship, such as the joint processes we describe as projects and careers.

As a relational concept, action goes beyond the duality of person and environment as the determinants of behavior, including suicidal behavior. The decisive features of an action theory informed explanation of suicide are neither simply personality dispositions nor characteristics of the environment. Personality dispositions and characteristics of the environment are combined in actions relevant to suicide. Thus, action is key to understanding both person and environment. Relational action also characterizes the process of understanding. We can understand what is going on better in acting with and relating to the person in some way. Finally, action as a relational concept is also pertinent to the ethical conduct of counselors involved with suicidal clients. As we discussed in Chapter 3, what facilitates the counselor–client relationship is key to dealing with suicidal clients. It is particularly important for counselors, in addressing the concerns of suicidal youth, to respect the way they understand their own and others' behavior. By using these concepts, we can secure the cooperation of clients, and by using a common language, we can secure a basic understanding in the counseling encounter.

Action is defined and understood as having a goal, but this is not identical to the conception of a goal as a cause of an action. The goal of suicide may be to end one's life, but ending one's life is not the cause. We know many instances of goal-directed actions when action is triggered not by a goal but other external or internal processes.

As described in previous chapters, action is understood in system theoretical terms. It is seen as containing three levels or sub-systems: first, there are steering sub-systems mostly defined by goals of action, second, functional sub-systems are identified with processes that enable the goal to be realized, and finally, in the sub-systems of regulation are the location of automatic or semiautomatic processes. We describe the latter in physical and structural terms, for example, physical movement of matter in space, and physical features of sound. The most useful assumption is that these three processes are engaged simultaneously in action. Further, many actions are the result of habits, which are triggered by the context we are in. While smoking their first cigarette might be a complex task for teenagers, it might be a subconscious routine for their parents when drinking a cup of coffee. Many of our actions and projects are joint goal-directed processes; however, some participants in actions might not be fully aware of the jointly pursued goals of these

actions. Nonetheless, they are goal-directed actions. These propositions are relevant for understanding of suicide behavior as well as for developing and supporting life-enhancing processes in youth and adolescents. They help us understand both the suicidal intention of the youth in transition to adulthood and their surprise and disbelief about what they were trying to do.

For some people, suicide raises the question of free will. For example, youth sometimes maintain, when asked about a suicide attempt they had survived, "I did not want to do it … I don't know what happened to me." This response is explained in the literature as an awareness of conscious goals ("I did not want to do it.") which follows the onset of brain activity for specific motor action (taking an overdose of medication). In some cases of micro movements, the goal cognition is no more than a monitoring function of motor behavior. In contrast, we consider that action is an ongoing integral process, not simply some processes preceding other processes. Sometimes suicidal youths believe that suicide is the only voluntary action with which to respond to the adversities they encounter. Furthermore some are convinced, wrongly, of course, that this is what some other participants in their joint project want them to do ("you'll be better off when I am gone"). Equally, an agent is often seen as a cause of action. But individual agency is not a given, rather it is the long-term product or result of actions and projects. For example, the book title *Becoming an agent* (e.g., Cochran & Laub, 1994) reflects the position that individual agency is acquired. Thus, a suicide action is not a product of failed responsibility of a person. Rather, it is a part of a system of suicide related goal-directed processes, that is, action, project, and long-term processes, which represent and form the person–environment relationship resulting in the notion of suicidal agent. Thus, in order to become effective in suicide prevention, we have to help the suicidal client develop a greater sense of agency in his or her life processes. Similarly, freedom of will is a cultural aim to which we ought to subscribe in order to participate in our society. Considering the neural plasticity of the brain, human beings are able to strive for freedom and move toward this goal. These ideas are of substantial importance when dealing with suicide, particularly when postulating that suicide is goal-directed action. They are equally important when helping youth develop life-enhancing projects and engage in actions with suicide preventive power. If, as counselors we do not believe that youth can design their life, any suicide prevention is deemed to fail. The adolescents mentioned in the examples above in this chapter, when asked further, would provide many details indicating a suicide project and a suicide career – a life detrimental or even destructive mid-term and long-term process.

Counseling Interventions for Suicide Prevention: A Contextual Action-Theory Perspective

As we treasure counselors' practical work, we start this discussion with the counselor–suicidal client encounter. It is important to see this meeting as a joint goal-directed action and as a part of a client's project with others and with the

counselor (see Chapter 3). Further, the client has to be seen as realizing other projects and important goals such as the identity-related goals. Thus, the question of how the client wants to be seen is the most important one for the counselor to attend to and intervene in accordingly. For example, a counselor response which reflects how the client wants to be seen might be, "I see that you are a very thoughtful person who thinks twice about what you are going to say before saying it." In response to this intervention, a quiet client may feel taken seriously and understood. Further, the client might allow an emotion and feeling to become manifest in this encounter. A client could expect that their joint venture includes reciprocal recognition and respect of expressed emotions and sensitivity for the salient ones. Treated in this way, the client will express satisfaction with the joint actions and projects (Michel et al., 2004). These are some of the necessary steps for successful relationship building required in the encounter of counselors and suicidal clients.

Understanding a client's life in terms of goal-directed processes and working toward the counselor's and client's joint suicide preventive mid-term and long-term goal-directed processes, the client has to be given every opportunity to tune into goal-directed processes. Thus, the counselor must treat the client as a competent narrator and provide satisfactory space for the client to develop narratives about their suicide. We were able to show that these narratives are indeed formulated as goal-directed processes in terms of actions, projects, and career (Valach, Michel, Young et al., 2002; Valach, Young, & Michel, in press). In these studies, the clients described suicide actions, suicide projects, and suicide career.

Case Example

The following example is a summary of a narrative provided by a young woman (whom we shall call Emma) on the threshold of adulthood. It refers to some of the aspects and principles of an action theory informed counseling intervention for suicide prevention. Emma is a qualified salesperson, who lives in an apartment with her boyfriend (Kurt). After overdosing, she came to a hospital and subsequently described to the therapist the following actions, projects, and career related to her suicide attempt.

Actions

"Having Unwanted Visitors" Action

Emma's female colleague came with Kurt's cousin to visit them in the evening. The colleague and the cousin were always arguing. "I can't stand it. There is tension in the air. It is crazy. They argued and used bad words." Emma felt as if she was

in the wrong place. “I cannot say why. I had the feeling that my colleague wants something from my boyfriend.”

Suicide Preceding (Triggering) Action

I talked to my sister on the phone in my room. I heard Kurt and my colleague laughing. At that moment his cousin was not there. I withdrew a bit and went downstairs into the laundry. I had the feeling that it might have improved by then. Returning and finding that it was the same, I felt I was in the wrong place. I felt ignored. They did not realize that I had returned. I asked myself about the meaning of my life, my being here. I felt like a piece in a dice game. One can play the game without me.

Key Suicide Action

Then a “short cut” reaction followed. “I wouldn’t have done that five minutes later. I took the pills. Before I could have taken more, my boyfriend appeared.”

“Going to the Hospital” Action

He drove me to the hospital. At first I did not want to go. I said that I have to finish what I started. Then I thought that life has nice sides to it as well. I just often do not see them. . . . There was nothing nice at that moment. I remembered the times when I thought that there are good moments in life which are well worth staying alive for.

It is important to distinguish these suicide actions from other descriptions. The young woman talked about the actions prior her suicide, how she attempted the suicide, and the actions following her attempt. These are not just events. They contain the description of what was happening, who participated in them, what were the goals, who performed what in function of these goals, what her feelings and emotions as well as thoughts were. Finally, we also can see some information about the structural properties of these actions. These descriptions provide counselors with a series of anchoring points for suicide prevention. They also inform the counselors about the client’s feelings, giving them the opportunity to reflect them and develop a good, trusting working relationship with this client.

In this case, Emma described an action in which she felt her relationship was challenged by another young woman. She experienced an argument which she hates. In response to that she withdrew. However, the feeling of not belonging, of being unwanted, and being in the wrong place was too existentially threatening for her. She also indicated the type of action “overdosing” based on the action relevant

fear of "not belonging." Nevertheless, she also mentioned positive cognitions when thinking about the value of life.

Projects

The client further described in her narrative, events and processes lasting longer than the above short-term actions. We define such mid-term processes "projects." These narrative events and processes dealt with her childhood, her adolescent years at school, in her apprenticeship, and in her relationships with boyfriends. Such projects referred to observable processes and other participants in her life. They also included the client's feelings that were considered relevant for her suicide attempt and its understanding. The client did not say that these were the causes of her suicide. However, they are well connected but in a different way, which we believe is conceptualized in the contextual theory of suicide as goal-directed action.

"Not Being Able to Get a Word in Edgewise" (Not Belonging) Childhood Project

Emma felt the same at home during her childhood, that is, that she did not belong while her brother was spoiled. Sitting at the table with her family she was never able to get a word in edgewise. That made her angry, in which situation she always stood up and left the table.

"Being Jealous of Her Brother" Project

Her brother was the youngest of four children; the only male and his mother adored him. Emma was jealous of him the whole time. This jealousy consumed her. Her other sisters were 5 and 6 years older than she is. When her sisters left home, she was on her own with her brother. He was the preferred one. Her father talked only with him. Occasionally, he spoke to Emma's mother but never to her. Her mother was very pleased when her son followed the same interests she (the mother) had. She considered him the best at school. But Emma's feeling of being ignored came mainly from her father.

"Boyfriend-Relationship" Project

One of Emma's previous boyfriends betrayed her with another woman. It hurt Emma a lot. She was close to saying, "why do I want to live." She asked herself, "what more can the other girl give than I can?"

"Previous Suicide" Project

Emma had never attempted suicide before, but she often thought about how she would do it. She never thought of taking pills. She thought about jumping. She had planned what she would do if she felt bad. She would jump.

"Managing Problems Well" Project (Job in a Large Department Store, Having an Understanding Boss)

There was a phase during which Emma forgot all her problems. She used to work in a large department store which she liked. She had a supervisor who tried to understand everyone and also talked to her employees. When Emma did not feel well, she went for a coffee with her. When Emma had had a big argument at home and could not stand staying there, she went to live at her supervisor's place. Emma reported that arguments make her feel very sad, they hurt her and make her feel worthless.

"Job in Another Department Store" Project

Subsequently, Emma found a job in another large department store. However, she did not feel happy there. She did not feel part of the team. She was unhappy going to work in the morning. Emma stated, "The customers are always stressed and the shop assistants aren't any better. The best are those who leave first. I don't like that. I don't have a good relationship with these people and with my supervisors." When she came home at the end of the week, she felt tired. Although she showered in order to refresh herself, she could not really enjoy anything. She did not feel like starting anything. Everything was too much.

"Feeling Excluded" Project

Emma always had a feeling of being excluded, of not belonging. She felt it at school. She felt that she belongs and, at the same time, not belong to those to whom she wanted to belong. She had some friends but did not particularly like them. Those she liked did not want to have her around. She wanted to be with those who were really good at school or with those who were active in doing wild things. She wanted to be someone. She did not feel good with her boyfriend, her female colleague, or her cousin.

"Female Colleague's Intervention in Her Relationship" Project

Recently, Emma's colleague had been at Emma's place very often. Emma reported that it seemed she was waiting for the moment when Emma was not at home because she wanted to see Emma's boyfriend, which Emma did not like. She asked herself, "what does this mean?" The colleague was getting on Emma's nerves, playing around with her boyfriend. Emma asked her boyfriend, "why is she always there when I am away?" He said he didn't know. Emma maintained that she should have told her colleague what she thinks about her. She should have challenged her.

Emma's projects indicate the themes and goals that were present for a long time in her life. We learn that she had to deal with the topic of being ignored and not given the necessary support to develop her sense of worth and confidence. She learned to cope or challenge this by developing a strong feeling of jealousy, which made it even worse. She felt that being deserted is very hurtful for her and she responded by developing a suicide project. The themes and goals with respect to not belonging were also salient at her vocational training. But some work experiences provided her with positive feelings of being taken seriously, being cared for. Her present situation with an interfering female colleague had also been developing for some time.

Projects After the Suicide Attempt

Emma described in her narratives developed during the interview a series of projects she is engaged in following her suicide attempt.

"Relationship No Longer a Habit" Project

Emma began to feel more comfortable with her boyfriend. "It is better now." Beforehand she felt that they were living apart. "Everything became a routine. There was nothing special in the relationship." They did not engage in long conversations any more. She was afraid that ". . .everything becomes a habit. He is there in the evening and in the morning." She was afraid of that. "That is gone. There is more to talk about after the suicide attempt."

"Self-Worth" Project

Emma expected help. She needed someone interested in her problems who would listen to her. She had a feeling of being worthless. Her key thought was, "I can't see any meaning in my life. I can't see a place for me. I asked myself why am I living. I don't have here the place I want. This thought is terrible and it is easy to reach for a pill or knife or whatever is available."

"Strengthening of Relationship with Mother" Project

Emma felt better following the suicide attempt. She contacted her mother and their relationship improved. Emma never thought that her mother could understand her. However, her mother now tried to help.

"Parting with the Female Colleague" Project

With regard to her relationship with her colleague, Emma stated, "This relationship should not be going on any further." Emma would like to return the colleague's things. She does not feel well when she is around. "I don't need to see her."

Therapy Project

Emma appreciated someone who could listen. She has the feeling that, ". . .people listen only as long as they are interested. Then they think about something else and only say yes or no. They don't care." If she could tell this to someone, perhaps the other person would understand. Perhaps the other person could help her with her problems. She would like to learn to cope better with her problems. She would like to respond in a different way.

The projects following her suicide are very clear and very positive. Emma indicated a number of tasks she would like to attend to as they serve her life-facilitating goal-directed processes.

Career

Emma also described a long-term process she closely associated with her suicide. This process included her childhood, adolescence, and her transition to adulthood, and was represented in a relationship career involving her parents and her.

"Problematic Relationship with Parents/Father" Career, Parallel to the Suicide Career

Emma used to have and still has a problem with her mother, but particularly with her father. "Father is a man who does not care. He is indifferent. Telling him something I had the feeling that I did not have to. He does not respond." She saw her relationship to her parents as closely related to the suicide. She maintained that there is a long story preceding her suicide attempt.

The career Emma saw her suicide action and the related projects embedded in provides a clear case for possible interventions. The counselor would have an

opportunity to explore the relevant actions, traumas, strong feelings, and possible resources to strengthen this client's life-career anchoring of her current projects and actions. For Emma and other young adult clients, there are life-facilitating or life-enhancing goal-directed processes in form of actions, projects, and careers which parallel the notion of suicide as a goal-directed process in form of action, project, and career. This notion of life-enhancing careers and projects represents the contribution of contextual action theory to positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Simply stated, a suicide preventive intervention is most successful when life-facilitating processes are strengthened and suicide processes weakened. Such an intervention must address all levels of action organization, that is, goals, steps, and behaviors, and all forms of goal-directed processes. This approach allows us to accommodate interventions such as controlling the availability of weapons or fatal doses of medications, addressing reasons for living, working on the impact of traumata, and practicing the planning of positive lifestyle.

Another important notion in the contextual action theory of suicide related to the transition to adulthood is how the link between suicide and life-facilitating goal-directed processes is steered. The classical suicide literature distinguishes between balance-sheet suicide (Rogers, Guellette, Abbey-Hines, Carney, & Werth, 2001; Werth, 1999) and impulsive suicide (Simon et al., 2001). Others use the terms rational suicide and affective suicide to discriminate between these types of suicide. More recently, the distinction between top–down and bottom–up steering has been formulated (Carver & Scheier, 2009). An example of bottom–up behavioral steering or control is how a familiar cue can cause a person to go off track and substitute another act for the act intended (Norman, 1981). We (Valach et al., 2006a) argue that suicide is a goal-directed process in form of action, project, and career, but the link between the suicide goal-directed processes and the life-facilitating processes could follow, either top–down, bottom–up steering, or a mixture of both. The example of the suicide story provided above illustrates well how suicide processes are goal directed, as the client in this case described a career, a suicide project, and a suicide action. However, the way everyday life-facilitating actions and projects were linked to the suicide processes could be seen partly as bottom–up steering. For example, some of the bottom–up processes for Emma included the following. She interpreted her situation as anchored in her narrative of traumatizing experiences and emotional memory of, "If there is an argument and I can't stand it, I withdraw." These experiences and memories were followed by the existentially threatening interpretation of "not belonging," coupled by the availability of pills, which were used in the sense of affording her the opportunity to respond to her subjective mental state. It is important for counselors to see background goal-directed processes related both to suicide and to life-facilitative processes. It is obvious that eliminating the link between these processes (here facilitated by the availability of the pills) would not have eliminated the possibility of suicide in Emma's life because the suicide project and the suicide career are still there and influential.

A final important point in dealing with suicide during the transition to adulthood is its social aspects, that is, the joint nature of suicide processes (Valach et al., 2006b). Speaking of the joint nature of suicide processes seems to conjure up the

possibility of blaming one of the parties in these joint processes. However, it is not a question who is to blame but a requirement to see both life-facilitating and suicide relevant processes as joint processes. They are undertaken by several people as goal-directed actions, projects, and careers. Thus, it is important to be able to evaluate these processes in counseling with the suicidal persons, and to develop joint projects and long-term suicide preventive and life-facilitating joint careers. It is important to see the health system as providing services for suicide clients, but it also is important to see suicidal adolescents from a different perspective than simply that of an illness. This chapter illustrates a shift from dealing with suicide as a causal product of risk factors to understanding of the clients and their suicidality. It also argues for the counselors and clients' joint work on suicide prevention in terms of goal-directed systems in form of joint action, project, and career at their different levels of the action organization (conscious goals, action steps, and unconscious regulation) and in their various links. Thus, we would call on all participants in the transition processes of adolescents to adulthood to support the life-enhancing actions, projects, and careers in this transition and to inquire about the possible links to the life-detrimental, destructive, or suicidal actions and projects with the determination to act upon them.

Conclusion

The transition to adulthood can be wrought with considerable, even irrevocable challenges. Suicide is one such challenge. It is important for counselors to be able to undertake standard risk assessments with adolescents and young adults who portend the suicidal ideation and behavior. At the same time, we have pointed out in this chapter that seeing suicide as causally determined by a constellation of factors is not very helpful to counselors. We suggested that suicide can be seen as goal-directed processes in form of action, project, and career. The encounter between the counselor and the client and particularly its ethical aspects (see Chapter 3) provide two of the most relevant supports for this conceptualization.

Chapter 14
Working with Narrative and Interpretation

This chapter deals with two important counseling processes in working with youth in the transition to adulthood, narrative and interpretation. At first glance these processes may seem quite separate, but, as we shall point out in this chapter, they are closely linked not only in counseling but also in the lives of clients more broadly. Writing about action we also repeatedly refer in this book to narratives and mention interpretation. These obviously are expressions we use beyond everyday usage and connect a particular theoretical conceptualization with these terms and a practical procedure when working with empirical material (Young & Collin, 1992).

Narrative is a story that is told, and perhaps recorded in some way. Any verbal or written statement does not in itself constitute a narrative. Rather a narrative is a story about an event or an action in life. Bruner (1990) distinguished between narrative and paradigmatic thinking, with the former focused on the particular, action-oriented, goal-directed, intentional, and sequential. Narratives can be stories of relatively brief events or extended accounts of longer periods in the narrator's life. The significant distinguishing features of narratives, pointed out by Reissman and Quinney (2005), are that they have sequence and consequence. In the language of action theory, narratives reflect the goal-directed nature of human action, that is, they include a consequence. Similarly, narratives are stories about action, projects, or careers that happen in time. "I went to the store to buy a loaf of bread" qualifies as a narrative, albeit a rather sparse one. "Existentialism is a philosophy that addresses personal meaning and responsibility" does not qualify as a narrative. Movement is also an essential characteristic of narrative, that is, what Riessman and Quinny identified as sequence. Movement is also represented in action. But action theory fleshes out our approach to narrative by suggestion that actions which are the primary constituents of narrative are a composite of goals, functional steps, and conscious and unconscious behaviors and resources, including skills and habits.

Broadly speaking, interpretation refers to making what is obscure clearer. Simply stated, interpretation is a process that leads us to two ways of understanding. First, we live in a world that invites and needs meaningful interpretation because, in many ways, so much of our world is obscure. This is particularly the case when the understanding of human actions is concerned. Second, we also have verbal and written texts, which may be, in some ways, direct expressions of something

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transcendental or what is truly human. In this case, hermeneutic interpretation engages in unpacking these references to the transcendental or truly human.

From an action-theory perspective, interpretation is both an everyday and a professional activity. We have already noted the difference between short-term action, mid-term projects, and long-term career. The immediate and short-term, that is, action, calls for interpretation. How are we to understand this or that action? Mid-term projects and long-term careers allow us to construct meaning frameworks in which particular actions can be linked and answer the questions, "What is this action is about?" The most urgent and prominent, that is, action, relies on its embedding in the actor's own projects and careers. This process of embedding reflects the importance and possibility of narrative. Interpreting joint actions, projects, and career also requires understanding the actions of others within various individual and joint projects and careers. As human beings, we interpret our own and others actions, our actions are interpreted by others, and these interpretations guide subsequent actions and projects. The processes providing the interface between actions, projects, and career are interpretative. This view of interpretation accounts for Dilthey's (1976) meaning of interpretation, meaning formulated by Heidegger (1962), the propositions listed by Habermas (1971), and Ricoeur's action understanding (Ricoeur & Kearney, 1996), among others. Narrative is an important form of interpretation, which becomes clear in the following example.

Consider a young client who presents herself for counseling. She is concerned about her choice of occupation, how to balance her work and with attending university, as well as her past and present relationships with her family. The latter emerges as the topic that receives the most attention in several counseling sessions with this client. The counselor is able to join the client in exploring the client's relationships with her family, including facilitating the client talking about her feelings about her family and constructing a narrative of her family and her place in it. By emphasizing the client's strengths and, with some suggestions about behavioral changes and actions outside of the counseling sessions, the counselor was able to help this client become more aware of the difficult feelings she had toward some members of her family, to begin to resolve them, and to have more successful interactions with her family.

Encouraging the narrative of a young woman who is independent in many areas of her life but is entitled to rely on parental support in other areas helps her create the narrative of a person who is diligent but not to a degree of self-destruction. In supporting the client in a search for an adequate language reflective of her emotional states and episodes, the counselor is helping the client to compensate for her deficits. Here the process of describing emotions helps the client construct a narrative with adequate emotional passages. By exploring together with the client the emotional roots of many parental actions, the counselor enables the client to develop a narrative in which she presents herself as less controlled, less dependent, and less victimized, with fewer conflicts and more understanding and appreciative of parental caring projects. Narratives of decision making, based on seeking internal solutions and relying on intuitive processes provide a basis for the client to develop more confidence in her "inner voice," and her cognitive and emotional

processes. Finally, constructing narratives of vocational and cultural projects and career provide support for the client's further actions Thus, narrative and interpretation are very practical actions. By working with and on narratives and by interpreting clients' actions, counselors and clients can achieve a better understanding of the links between client actions, projects, and career.

Narrative has received particular attention with regard to transition to adulthood and identity projects (e.g., McAdams, 1996). The connection between narrative and identity is captured in the first of 12 characteristics of the "self" Bruner (2004) identified, that is, it is "teleological and agentive, replete with desires, intentions, and aspirations and endlessly in pursuit of goals" (p. 6). Indeed, it has been shown that the development of narrative represents a sense of personal continuity, linking past, present, and future. Action theory incorporates this notion of constructing meaning across time with its conceptualization of the relationship of action, project, and career, which has been described in previous chapters (see, for example, Chapter 10 on identity). Pasupathi and Hoyt (2009) cited the argument that narrative identity "develops via the microprocess of developing specific narratives in particular situations" (p. 599). Specific narratives emerge from specific actions and larger identity narratives are constructed for actions across time, that is, projects. What action theory provides is a conceptualization of how actions, projects, and career connect past, present, and future. For example, in a conversation with her mother, this 19-year-old woman narrated the reaction of her peers to her plan to marry soon:

> Because I find that most 30-year olds and singles that I'm telling I'm getting married immediately tell me negative stuff . . . (laughs). It's just immediate; it's like, "Oh you're too young," or "You, you don't know what you're getting into," or "You'll understand when you're older.". . .

In this brief narrative, the woman summarizes several specific actions that relate to her friends reactions to her plan to marry. These actions have a shared meaning for her in terms of her peers' common response to her intention to marry. The actions also have meaning in terms of her marriage project and marriage career as well as her identity project. The fact that she is relating this story to her mother is another aspect of the narrative. Like many young people, parents are often an important, but not the only audience for narratives about long-term career. We also suggest that it is likely that the action of telling this brief story is important for the young woman's identity and her transition to adulthood. It is easy to recognize that this narrative could represent identity exploration. It could also foreshadow feelings of uncertainty about how anticipated changes will affect her future.

The literature on identity narratives in adolescence has focused on meaning, which clearly implicates interpretation in narrative construction (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1993; McLean, 2008). But the action-theoretical perspective also includes cognitive and emotional processes represented in the events the narratives recount as well as in their telling. These are not separate from interpretation and meaning, but can be recognized and addressed in narrative construction. Consider the cognitive and emotional processes represented in this narrative of a

women named Karen recounting her father's death when she was 12 years old and its transitional impact in her own life:

> I held his head in my lap and he just gasped a few times and then got cold very quickly. My mother was hysterical, the dog was hysterical. I remember that night so well and it's not easy to relive it for you today. I became an adult that night and really, I've never been a kid again since. (Bentz, 1989, p. 177)

There are several aspects about the emotional processes in this narrative that immediately strike us. First, the narrative itself is likely to have elicited an emotional response in us as readers. Karen was able to transport us to this moment in her life. We are engaged because of the humanness of the moment that is the death of Karen's father, the relative age of the narrator, the paradox of a young girl being able to keep her head when her own mother could not. We are also struck by the significance of the outcome of this event for Karen, at least how she interpreted it. It changed her life significantly, and we can read both regret and certainty in her statement, "I've never been a kid again since."

The cognitive and emotional processes that Karen relied on and accessed in telling this story are not simply reproduced as if there were a storage faculty that could be accessed and historical information recalled without reference to the action of narrating this story. This narrative action was constructed within the meaningful joint process between Karen and the research interviewer (Bentz, 1989). Karen indicated that in telling the story she was reliving a difficult emotional memory. As is recounted in Karen's longer narrative, this story is critical in construction of her current actions, projects, and career, and in the joint action/project she constructed with the researcher. Another powerful example is the distinction between agency and victim narratives (Bruner, 1994). The narrative in which a person is subjected to threats, pressure, obstructions, and pain inflicted by others is better transformed to a narrative in which the person is an agent who can address challenges and work on strategies of coping with the problems. Here, the action of narratives is less an exposition to a threatening situation, as in the previous example, and more a reworking and reconceptualizing of the threatening and similar situations.

The philosophical perspectives on narrative identity taken by both Ricoeur (1984, 1985, 1987) and Taylor (1989) highlight its importance for the transition to adulthood. Both philosophers suggest the importance of narrative as the moral compass for one's life, the means through which one can take an ethical stand, and eventually for the commitments one makes. Taylor emphasized the notion of *themes* which connect narratives across a lifetime. In Taylor's view interpretation is critical to narrative. He used the word *character* to epitomize the successful lifetime narrative. He wrote,

> . . .making sense of one's life as a story is also, like orientation to the good, not an optional extra. . . . In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going. (p. 47)

In contrast, Ricoeur stressed employment, reflecting a more explicit connection to action. Employment refers to the structuring of events into a whole. In the counseling literature, Cochran (1997) reflects more of an employment perspective in identifying the steps in constructing a life narrative.

Both Taylor's and Ricoeur's view are important to youth in the process of transitioning to adulthood. They are in many respects engaged in answering the question, "Who am I?" Actions and project as well as narratives are answers to that question. In some cases narratives, even if tentatively offered, are more explicit answers to the questions, while the meaning of actions can sometimes invite more substantial interpretation. But even as youth seek to develop more substantial narratives, they are living the actions that will construct these narratives.

Narrative is also a relational action. For example, Pasupathi and Hoyt (2009) found that the development of narrative identity in late adolescence and early adulthood was facilitated when responsive friends were the listeners.

Narrative and Counseling

Narrative has a significant part in many approaches to counseling and psychotherapy (e.g., Angus & McLeod, 2004). For example, narrative career counseling is a constructivist approach, rooted in the constructivist epistemology, emphasizing language, discourse, and theme development (e.g., Cochran, 1997; Collin & Young, 1992; McIlveen & Patton, 2007a,b; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; Young & Valach, 2000). In this approach, career development involves developing a coherent personal and professional narrative. By creating personal career narratives, clients are encouraged to make transitions in accordance with mid-term projects and long-term career.

We see narratives occurring in counseling in many ways. For example, in life-design counseling (Savickas et al., 2009), narrative is proposed as a means through which individuals construct or design their lives. It is one of three goals of counseling and interventions, which are, "adaptability, narratability, and activity" (p. 245). As a goal of counseling, narratability involves the counselor helping "clients to formulate the identity in their own words and to map out their system of subjective identity forms" (p. 245). Subjective identity forms (see Guichard, 2005, 2009) have parallels to identity and other projects in action theory because they relate to meaning and relationship to others in particular contexts. Furthermore, it is identified as the focus for particular attention in developing skills in life-design counseling.

In contextual action theory, we speak about an interface of counseling actions, clients' lives, and clients' narratives. We argue that these three domains are not only interdependent, but also that they even build upon each other and stem from each other. By understanding goal-directed processes in form of action, project, and career, we can better understand why counseling interventions, clients' everyday lives, and clients' narratives are connected. This is not exclusively and solely because "that is how it is" (the ontological argument). It is primarily because clients,

counselors, and people generally, construct their everyday lives, their narratives, and counseling interventions as goal-directed processes. We also consider goal-directed processes highly desirable in our culture.

Establishing the Connection Between Lives, Counseling Process, and Narratives

The connection between lives, counseling process, and narratives can be achieved by organizing the counseling process in the terms of goal-directed processes and by engaging in narratives and joint interpretation that link actions, projects, and career in a life-enhancing way. While facilitating the client's narrative, the counselor witnesses the client's construction of ongoing projects and individual action. For example, consider the following exchange between a counselor and a 21-year-old female client who is exploring her own self-awareness about her identity:

Client: . . .Like in a lot of the things that I've done in the last year and a half, I've learned a lot, um, I've gained a lot of confidence that I think has allowed me to make a step in this relationship [with my mother], um, . . . for instance, ah, . . . last year I had an, an employer who I was having a lot of trouble with and in the year before that I'd had a teacher I was having problems with, and both of them women, and my dad said to me, "Maybe you have problems with women in authority," and, I guess I thought, oh maybe I do, and. . .

Counselor: Did you believe that?

Client: Well. . .

Counselor: Or just question it?

Client: It was kind of, it was funny, you know when your confidence is kind of low and when somebody tells you something that maybe makes sense, you just assume it must be true.

Counselor: Assume it is.

Client: Yeah, because sometimes you don't really trust what you actually think.

The client continued her narrative by describing more recent relationships with women in authority that have been successful for her and which contradict her father's assessment about the client having trouble with women in authority. More importantly, earlier in this session and in previous sessions, the counselor and the client had themselves established a strong relationship, such that the client was able to say in the self-confrontation interview following this session, "[It was] really validating and what I just said and it sounded like she really understood what had happened, and it felt like I was being validated."

When counselors encourage narratives to be developed using the client's reference system, they allow clients to acquire competence in this particular domain of counseling, that is, in constructing narrative. At the same time, while allowing a

client to fully develop action and project narratives, the counselor facilitates a particular way for the client to think about his or her future life. Thus, the narratives are important both as the source for linking clients' lives and the counseling process and a tool to making this link.

With such a backdrop in mind we can approach the client–counselor joint construction of narratives. We ask, "How do clients go about sharing their narratives and what is the content of their narratives?" Narratives occur in many ways in counseling and in clients' lives and have to be recognized when they do. Narrative counseling and therapy have developed a system of assessing narratives (e.g., Hardtke & Angus, 2004) and a procedure for developing alternative narratives (e.g., White, 2004). For our purposes, the observation of how a narrative is presented or developed and how clients present their current, past, and future lives is relevant. It also is important to add that in our conceptualization narrative is a joint process of client and counselor. Consider this counseling exchange in which a young man considers dropping out of university to pursue training as a chef:

Client: . . .how to make correct decisions in sort of stressful situations and things like that.

Counselor: Hm. How do you, how do you think people see you, how are you perceived? How will you proceed?

Client: Um, I don't know. I guess right now I'm worried that, you know, I don't want people to see me as a like a, you know, just a dropout, that I, you know, dropped out of university and that's it, [that] I, you know, couldn't cut it kind of thing. But, I don't know, that's kind of, that's sort of, like I know what jobs I don't want to do. That's sort of how I hope I'm not perceived right now.

Counselor: Uh hm.Client: And I think that's also because, ah, you know, I'm not working right now. I feel ah, sort of the kind of the same negative feelings because I have so much time to sit around and think about how other people might be perceiving me.

Initial questions counselors can ask themselves include the following. Is the narrative presented in a secure or insecure manner? Is it presented as a matter of fact like an official report? Are feeling expressed with or without the counselor's help? Is the narrative long or short? What role does the counselor have in the construction of narrative?

Actions, projects, and career are represented in the content of narratives and narratives can be assessed for evidence of them. The role narrators ascribe to themselves in joint processes, the types of actions, projects, and career described can also be determined. The three points of entry for improving the quality of clients' lives and the transition to adulthood in particular are goal-directed action, project, and career as organized in clients' lives, in counseling, in their narratives. It is important that counselors appreciate both the comparability of these three domains and that they depend on and build upon each other. Clients' quality of life cannot be improved without some changes in their narratives. Similarly, desired changes the client's life has to be reflected in the counseling process. A more agentic client

is not likely to result from a less agentic therapeutic relationship. Improved emotional monitoring can occur when it is practiced in counseling and reflected in client narratives.

Working with Interpretation

When counseling youth in transition to adulthood, counselors and clients engage in joint actions. These actions are often narrative actions of past, present, and future events, actions, and projects. Describing actions does not involve simply recollecting their physical or behavioral features. Rather it includes and even starts with the meaning of these actions. Thus, this process of describing action can be understood as interpretation, particularly when linked to projects and careers. Furthermore, the narrative action of interpretation is an important everyday construction tool in our social and personal lives. Counseling theory, practice, and research can profit substantially by embracing the narrative action of interpretation.

Interpretation, although a common practice in counseling and psychotherapy, has different and often specific meanings. For example, in psychoanalysis (Freud, 1978), the analysand's verbal material was considered obscure and disguised. It was interpreted according to a given and highly developed system of constructs and relationships. In contrast, in counseling that emphasizes the formal assessment of client characteristics, the interpretation of the results of standardized tests has been and continues to be common practice. In this case, interpretation refers to the explanation of the analysis of the client's aggregated responses to the test items in light of the meaning of the scales and the norms established for them. Constructionist and hermeneutical approaches to interpretation are more common in recent counseling approaches. Here, as we have noted earlier, the counselor recognizes that actions, narratives, and other experiences are themselves interpretations. The counselor focuses on the meaning of the client's actions and discourse, although in many cases counselors, like most people, assume meaning unless confronted with some discrepancy. The following example illustrates a counselor using this broad interpretative approach with a young man who is concerned about his future occupation:

Client: The reason for that was when I was doing the, well I guess when we were doing career exploration in one of the programs . . . you have to do a survey and then it determines your personality that actually fits into criteria about work.

Counselor: Right.

Client: It's kind of related to your personality. [Counsellr: Mmm.] And one of them was physiotherapy and it sounded so cool so I chose that. It was before I got injured because of basketball and I had to go to physiotherapy. [Counselor: Mmm.] And the reason why

I think, one of the biggest influences on me changing my perception about this physiotherapy was when I took English in college and [Counselor: Mmm.] and our topic was on the media and about influencing people [Counselor: Mmm.] like I mean the media's influence on people.

Counselor: Yes.

Client: And I guess that really hit me hard too, because I learned that, oh, that maybe the life I had been living was like a lie, like people had told me to live this way, because, I don't know, so the guys that are really high up there, you know, so they could profit from me, and I didn't like that fact.

Counselor: Ok.

Client: So I wanted to be like the leader, you know, was influencing people.

Counselor: Ok, so that course had that huge impact on you.

Client: Yeah.

Counselor: In terms of making you realize that it was important to influence rather than be kind of at the bottom or whatever.

Client: Yeah.

Counselor: Like you mentioned being an employee didn't sound really appealing.

Client: . . .yeah, it was after that when I started working in retail, when I started taking sales [courses]. . .

Interpretation can also be understood from the perspective of contextual action theory. In this approach, clients are seen not only as reliable interpreters of their own actions, projects, and careers, but also as using the same interpretative framework as counselors. In these interpretations, the temporal dimensions of action, project, and career are employed, that is, clients and counselors make sense of actions as having immediate, mid-term and/or long-term meaning. Also both clients and counselors use the framework of goals, functional steps, and specific behaviors and resources to understand action. Interpretation in contextual action theory asks what the goal of an action, project, or career is, and concurrently understands that action in the context of internal processes and specific behaviors. Contextual action theory is also additive to more general hermeneutical and constructionist approaches because it reflects the joint nature of interpretation. Interpretation, as we have elaborated elsewhere (Young et al., 2002), is making sense of the experience of goals. The interpretation that counselors can offer clients parallels the interpretation that clients make of their own behavior in light of their short actions, mid-term projects, and possibly long-term career. But the interpretation also applies to the process that occurs between clients and counselors. Interpretation in contextual action theory helps clients become aware of the constructs they are using. It can support clients in their use of constructs that work for them, and does not introduce constructs that are foreign to them.

We also recognize that clients and counselors may not always be able to account fully for their actions. At the level of elements, there may be a specific behavior

that contradicts or is incongruous with apparent goals. These apparent contradictory or incongruent elements or behaviors may be reported outside of counseling or may arise in the counseling session between the counselor and the client. Elsewhere we have provided a case example how the action between a client and a counselor generated incongruent behavior elements, for example, approaching and avoiding the counseling relationship, that seemed to represent unconscious goals (Dyer et al., 2010). In the process of interpretation, counselors need to be aware of the possibility of unconscious goals. They may find it advantageous to recognize that being aware of the levels enunciated in action theory, that is, goals, functional steps, and elements, will assist in identifying and bringing unconscious goals and incongruent behavior to the surface.

A Specific Procedure for Counseling Parents and Youth in Transition

We are able to describe one procedure for counseling youth in transition to adulthood and their parents based on the research reported in this book and in which narrative and interpretation have explicit parts. In this procedure, joint and individual narratives are generated based on an understanding of a parent–youth conversation related to the transition to adulthood. These narratives, described in detail below, provide a description of a specific action, in this case, the conversation, in lay, goal-directed language, and interpret the meaning of this joint action for joint and individual projects. The procedure can be described in detail as follows.

Counseling based on contextual action theory can be seen as having three phases or broad steps. These steps are implemented within the context of an effective therapeutic relationship and working alliance between counselor and clients (e.g., Bordin, 1994). The aim of the first phase is to identify ongoing projects that are pertinent to the clients. Projects are identified by having clients engage in joint actions as part of counseling, video-recording these actions, and having clients observe them to identify their subjective processes and social meaning. Briefly stated, an example of a project might be a parent and youth focusing on developing skills that will help the youth succeed on her own. The second phase involves working on these projects, including their regular monitoring. Monitoring of the identified and agreed-upon projects takes the form of regular telephone calls with the clients and of their systematic logbook entries in regular time segments. The counselor also works on the project with the clients – individually or together – in which the pertinent issues are addressed. The third phase provides a close-up review of the changes that have been achieved with the aim of stabilizing them toward future goals. The purpose here is for the clients to identify changes in the way they conduct their original and/or new project. Their analysis of their performance and their report on their wishes will indicate other desired interventions to round out the counseling project. Other

ongoing support of the clients such as in form of regular calls, e-mails, or postcards to the clients is possible.

Client Population

The described method is suitable for any family with an adolescent interested in counseling about transition issues in youth and young adulthood, generally considered age 17 and older. Career and/or mental health counseling centers are possible locations for this kind of counseling. Family issues pertinent to transition are particularly suitable. For example, a mother and daughter (19 years of age) may be experiencing difficulty in terms of the daughter launching her own occupational route.

Phase 1. Session 1 – Initial Encounter Between the Counselor and the Client

The purposes of Session 1 are to orient clients to the goals and processes of the counseling method and to facilitate a thorough and meaningful cognitive and emotional exploration of the presenting concerns. The specific procedure described here may be introduced to the clients prior to their first session with the counselor, or may be proposed to them as part of a subsequent session. In either case, the clients, involving at least one parent and youth/adolescent will participate in one or two initial sessions that include an interview, a video-recorded conversation between the parent and adolescent, and two video-recall (self-confrontation) interviews. This different counseling method can be proposed to clients as an invitation to participate in a new form of counseling in which what they are doing together plays a major role. This method also allows clients to be more active than is the case in much traditional counseling. Their active engagement is encouraged by their observation of, and perspective on, their own behavior as well as keeping front and center the meaning their joint actions have for them, the feelings and thoughts they have about it, and the specifics of their behavior. It is critical to respect, validate, and enhance client intentions and agency in the process of obtaining their agreement to participate in this counseling before continuing.

The three main components of the initial session (or sessions, as it may take two meetings to accomplish these tasks) are first, to provide clients with the opportunity to tell their stories, that is, broadly speaking, how they have come to have difficulty in the transition process, to show emotions related to their stories and issues, and to experience being empathically heard and validated by the counselor. The counselor listens as the clients present their pertinent issue – this is the first encounter between the counselor and clients, and proceeds as many other counseling or therapies do. The counselor recognizes in the clients' stories their important goals, which are reflected back to the clients to help them fully grasp them as goals. Emotions

are identified, acknowledged, and named, and emotional repression, if present, is addressed. Through these actions, the working relationship between the counselor and clients is established.

Second, the counselor attempts to facilitate a conversation between the parent and youth at which the counselor is not present, but which is video-recorded. The purpose of this conversation is to provide as naturally as possible a continuation of the joint project in which the parent and youth are already engaged. The conversation is used as the basis for individual video-recall interviews (self-confrontation) with both the parent and the youth. The counselor might assist in facilitating the parent–adolescent interaction in the following way:

> I would like to ask you to discuss between the two of you some of the issues relevant to the main topic we mentioned previously. Perhaps you might like to pick up on one of the last discussions you have had recently. I am going to leave you here, give you some time, say about 10–15 minutes, to explore the issue. Whenever you finish please call me, I'll be in the next room. After this, each of you will see the video recording of your conversation and will be asked about the thoughts and feelings you have had during it.

After the parent–youth conversation is completed, each person separately reviews part or all of the videotape with the counselor. Essentially, this provides each client an opportunity to reflect on his or her thoughts and feelings during the conversation, heightening awareness of them, as well as providing an understanding of how one's individual and joint behavior relates to client individual and joint goals. The self-confrontation interview proceeds by the counselor introducing it in the following way:

> Now we are going to watch the conversation you had had previously with your mother (father/son/daughter). I will stop the video whenever a short meaningful part ends – say after each 1–3 minutes – and ask you to tell me the thoughts and feelings you experienced during these few minutes of the conversation. You can also stop the video whenever you would like to report on thoughts and feelings or provide any information, which might help in understanding your conversation.

At the end of the initial session or sessions, the clients are thanked for their cooperation and any characteristics of the session are noted, for example, their openness, honesty, thoroughness, lively exchange, or thoughtfulness. The counselor may continue in the following manner:

> I will consider all the material you generated today and try to formulate the important issues addressed in your conversation. At our next meeting, I will present to you the goals I think you were pursuing in your conversation and those I assume you are aiming at in your life as well. For that I would like to arrange a meeting in about 2–3 weeks.

Prior to Session 2, the counselor views the video-recording of the conversation and the video-recall interviews and, writes two narrative summaries, one for each client from their perspective, of the conversation in which he/she identifies the projects and goals of these clients at the individual and joint level.

Session 2

The purpose of Session 2 is to identify and confirm the pertinent parent–youth project that the clients would like to monitor. A written narrative summary of their conversation recorded in the previous sessions and unique to each client is provided to each client individually and reviewed with the counselor. These narrative summaries describe the conversation in goal-directed language easily understandable by lay persons. They address goals, functional steps, and specific behaviors of the clients in the conversation, and include information from the self-confrontation and the conversation with the counselor. Subsequently, the clients meet together with the counselor and are invited to share their narrative summaries and to discuss further how they are experiencing the transition process and related issues at home. The goals as presented by the clients and elaborated by the counselor from the joint conversation are discussed and a consensus is reached on the identification of the joint parent–youth transition-related project. For example, a counselor–client exchange might go as follows:

> I studied your conversation and I believe that both of you are together pursuing a goal for Susan (the youth) to find personal independence and clarity in her occupational concerns. Susan, you seem to be intensively engaged in establishing a border between your mother and yourself and in securing space for your individuality, independent decision making and taking action. Rhonda (the parent), you have the same desire to make Susan's transition as smooth and as free of crises and mistakes as possible. I was wondering whether you feel that this also is your overreaching goal, which often is behind the casual exchanges you have at home.

At this point the parent and youth might express their views, add some details and a consensus is reached on the formulation of both the narrative and the relevant project. The next steps in the method are explained to the clients and the necessary instructions and material are provided. The counselor may wish to see the clients together or separately to work on specific issues that have been identified. The counselor also invites the clients to monitor the parent–youth transition project by keeping a log (either in written format, as a digital/computer file, or on audiotape) of pertinent joint or individual actions. A format for the log is provided (Table 14.1). In addition, the counselor suggests to the clients that he/she will phone each of them every 2 weeks over the next 6 months to ask about how this project is going for them, whether the project has changed, and what successes and difficulties they are experiencing. This might sound laborious. However, it is an established postulate in counseling that client goals should be considered in a decisive manner (e.g., Egan, 2007).

Session 3

The third session with the clients separately or with either client individually is optional, at the discretion of the counselor and the clients. Its purpose is to address specific aspects of the joint project that can benefit from particular attention and

Table 14.1 Log book for participants

This logbook is intended to assist you in the joint project that you identified for the transition to adulthood. It provides you an opportunity to keep track of the activities related to your project as well as record your thoughts and feelings about them. It is primarily for you alone, although aspects from it may be discussed with the counselor or the other family member with whom you are engaged in this project.
When you alone or with the family member involved in this project, do something *together* that is related to your transition to adulthood project, for example, have a conversation about future career plans, please take a moment to record what happened
Date:
Activity: What action or activity, related to your monitoring project, did you do?
Goal: What you were hoping to accomplish through this action/activity?
Thoughts and Feelings: What were your thoughts and feelings as you participate in this activity?
Outcomes and Barriers: How did the activity turn out, and what (if anything) got in the way of achieving your goals?

work with the counselor. For instance, the communication skills could be explained and practiced, emotional control addressed, interactive skills, information requests, or problems such traumas of the parent or youth, current personal concerns and difficulties are worked on.

Phase 2

During Phase 2, which is a monitoring period of a reasonable length determined by the clients and counselor, the counselor telephones each client once every 2 weeks, preferably at a predetermined time. The format for these telephone calls is provided in Table 14.2. During the same period, each client is asked to keep a log of joint or individual actions that pertain to the project. The purpose of this monitoring is to regularly foreground the perceived individual and joint goals, and actions that make up each person's participation in the joint project. Ideally, this process facilitates an accountable space for evaluation that might not happen otherwise.

As mentioned previously, during this phase the counselor and clients may choose to work individually on identified areas that, if addressed, will facilitate the joint project.

Phase 3

At the end of the agreed upon monitoring period, the clients are invited for another session with the counselor, which is similar in format to the initial session. It

Table 14.2 Transition to adulthood counseling support: bimonthly telephone monitoring protocol

Client name:	Contact call #:	Date of phone call:

1. During the interviews, the project we came up with was [name the project for the client]. Is that still the focus of what you are doing with your [mother/father]/[son/daughter], or has it changed? How can you tell it has stayed the same/changed?
2. Did you have any project-related activities or conversations since the last time we spoke?
3. Did you have the chance to fill out your diary after you did the activity? If not, ask "what seems to be holding you back from completing the diary?"
4. What kinds of project-related things did you do since the last time we spoke? [For each, elicit details regarding: (a) alone or who with when doing activity; (b) meaning of that activity for them; (c) how did that activity relate to their project.]
5. What does doing/not doing those things mean for you in terms of your relationship with your [mother/father]/[son/daughter]?
6. What goals toward your project, if any, do you think you have achieved since we last spoke?
7. What barriers to your goals have you come across since we last spoke?
8. What stands out for you the most in terms of the project since we last spoke? What are the most meaningful project-related events, thoughts, feelings, and/or circumstances that have happened?
9. Has anything else been going on with your project that we have not talked about yet?

includes a video-recorded conversation between the parent and youth and video-recall (self-confrontation) interviews with each of them. The aim of this phase is to obtain a picture of the achieved changes and to assure future progression of the launched and improved or corrected projects and systems that support them. It begins by eliciting and listening to narratives from each of the clients about their experience with, and feelings about, the project. Another video-recorded conversation between the youth and parent, and subsequent self-confrontation interviews follow this joint conversation. Relevant counseling interventions are used whenever requested, problems become visible, or ongoing processes need support. Finally, with both clients present, a final integration and evaluation of the project are discussed.

Actual and Possible Outcomes

In our use of this method, the overwhelming majority evaluated their participation in it positively. Parents and youth generated more opportunities to talk to each other and discuss topics they might not otherwise have talked about. For example, a parent commented, "It brought up things we wouldn't talk about otherwise, it might've made the experience … that sort of transition, it made it more obvious to her … what was left kind of unresolved we talked about." A youth from another family stated, "Well, I guess it's helped push me a bit because, we had to have those conversations and, push me towards, realizing something that my mom wanted, and that maybe I wanted, too. But we didn't know each other's opinions about that."

The self-confrontation interview was also positively received, although a few participants noted a degree of unfamiliarity or even disappointment with their voice or appearance on the video. However, they appreciated that a joint project had been clearly identified and agreed upon by all involved. The telephone monitoring reminded them regularly to keep working on the project. A parent commented, "...cause it keeps it current, it keeps it happening in your head, when someone's calling and talking to you about it." In using the log books, participants became aware of certain positive or negative regularities which they consciously kept practicing further or changed (Table 14.1). For example, one mother realized that she typically initiated conversations with her son about important, transition-related issues, late at night when he wanted to go to bed. Analyzing this pattern led her to report that she made sure that she would be home earlier so that they can talk while getting their meal ready. Finally, a general consensus across participants was a sense of appreciation that the other person was interested enough in the joint project to be involved in the monitoring as well as their interpersonal communication. A youth commented, "...throughout most of the conversation I was really interested in what he was saying. I mean, he has a lot on his mind, really ... and I thought, you know ... I know a lot more about him now ... about his parenting theories and such." Another youth stated, "...[it] just made me realize, like, the relationship that I do have with my mom. And that it is a special relationship and that I'm grateful that I have a relationship like this with my mom because, I feel that it's genuine and real, and I realize that I do have a really great mom."

Many participants reported improvement in their projects and actions following this procedure, such as achieving a better understanding and improving their individual strategies of reaching the other person more effectively. Still others reported a new sense of understanding and valuing of the relationship that did not exist before going through this procedure. We also realized that parents and youth can solve many problems, such as relationship difficulties, when aided by this method to identify and maintain a sense of focus that might otherwise not have been sustained. The method can help parents and youth better utilize all available resources in the family and work jointly on the transition project without constantly falling into relationship traps. This procedure is very empowering as it helps clients to tap their own resources.

Conclusion

In this chapter we underlined the importance and the distinction of two processes: narrative and interpretation. We emphasized both the goal-directedness and timeline of narratives and the secular and practical character of interpretation within the goal-directed processes. By doing so, we were able to point out their common denominator and everyday reference: goal-directed action. It is not only what we talk about in narratives and try to make sense of by linking the actions to projects and career-like processes in interpretation, but also what we do in counseling.

We acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of many and surely we have unintentionally not mentioned many who prepared this way of looking at the transition from adolescence to adulthood in this manner. Nevertheless, we were able to describe briefly our procedures for using narratives and interpretation in dealing with clients' goal-directed processes in the joint actions and projects of counseling. Believing that these procedures can be easily reproduced and applied, we hope they become familiar and empowering. By lifting narrative and interpretation out of their textual and story context and inserting them into practical settings, we propose that contextual action theory is a vehicle by which the narratives and interpretation can obtain new strength in counseling practice and theory.

Chapter 15
Using the Self-Confrontation Procedure in Counseling

Throughout this book, we rely extensively on the self-confrontation interview to understand the actions of youth, their parents, counselors, and other involved in the transition process. The research participants generated these self-confrontation interviews as they watched a video playback of the action in which they had just participated. For example, a mother watches the playback of her conversation with her son. The video is viewed with a researcher who stops the video approximately every minute. The researcher follows and respects the meaningfulness of the sequence being viewed and may stop it before or after the minute has elapsed. The researcher then asks the parent to recall her thoughts and feelings during that moment that they had just watched. The parent could also make any other comment about the segment viewed as long as it is clear to the interviewer whether the thought or feeling occurred then or now. The premise underlying the use of the video in this way is that our action is steered, controlled, and given meaning, often even regulated by our internal thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Unpacking these thoughts and feelings through the self-confrontation interview provides substantial understanding of the joint action of the participants. In the action-project method, we are constantly relating social meaning to manifest action. The self-confrontation interview is one means of understanding that relationship has been found useful in career research from an action perspective (Young et al., 1994).

From a scientific perspective one can argue whether the thoughts and feelings a person had during a prior action can be reliably accessed in the self-confrontation interview. For example, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) suggested that research participants tend to explain their actions to fit the researchers' expectations. Others proposed that the cognition of a goal is an a posteriori justification of our internal impulses (e.g., Libet, 1999), while still others maintain that our actions are steered by stable, long-term dispositions which have to be accessed in a different way, such as by personality tests, rather than in the monitoring of an ongoing action (see also the person–situation debate in Fleeson, 2004; Kenrick & Funder, 1988). These discussions reach far beyond methodological issues. We addressed some of these questions in several other publications (e.g., Valach, Young, et al., 2002; Young et al., 2002), but obviously, there is no definitive answer to these problems, either from us or anyone else.

R.A. Young et al., *Transition to Adulthood*, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-6238-6_15,

We know that in inquiring about particular processes long after the action has occurred, the cognitions or emotions reported by the interviewee are likely to be substantially distorted. This distortion is due to the fact that many of these thoughts and feelings are quickly forgotten. Most of them are not processed in long-term memory and could not be recalled hours or days later. As well, in an interview long after the action had occurred, the interviewee likely has to use higher order concepts to deal with the researcher's questions, such as explanation, justification instead of description. Consequently, the interviewee may not access the specific thoughts and feelings experienced during the action. The self-confrontation interview addresses these issues in several ways. First, it is conducted very soon after the target actions, that is, at a time when more thoughts and cognitions are still well remembered. Second, the interview focuses on a very brief specific segment of an action allowing the interviewee to talk about specific thoughts and emotions that occurred at the time of the target action. Finally, seeing the actual actions reproduced in a film or video substantially enhances the actor's recall. Of course, watching and being asked to recall one's emotions and cognitions are themselves significant processes. Thus, the self-confrontation procedure has the potential to have a considerable impact on the person engaged in it.

Several mediating processes in the self-confrontation procedure have been noted, including self-attention (Gibbons, 1983), self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972, 1973), and feedback (Carver, 1979; Carver & Scheier, 1981). Although the exact mechanism is waiting for detailed analysis, the impact of these processes has been described. Already in 1963 Kagan, Krathwohl, and Miller concluded, on the basis of a case study, that "IPR (interpersonal process recall, a video supported recall) seems to have accelerated the productivity of this therapeutic experience. The client gained insight into her own behavior; interpreted relatively slight incidents and postures in a much deeper manner than in the initial interview; and brought repressed affect to the surface. All of these could well have contributed to her progress in therapy" (p. 242). The research on the impact of video feedback or video-supported recall provided results in the years following Kagan and colleagues early work with IPR. These research findings are more complex than Kagan et al.'s initial findings. For example, some researchers reported positive enhancement of the therapy process (Furman, 1990), others could not find any improvement (Padgett, 1983) (see Aderka, 2009, for a meta analysis of video feedback in social phobia).

The self-confrontation procedure can also be used in counseling, which we describe and illustrate in this chapter (see also Popadiuk et al., 2008; Valach, Michel, Dey, et al., 2002). In counseling, both functions of the self-confrontation procedure are present, that is, the counselor and client learn more about the action that was videotaped, and the process of participating in the self-confrontation likely has an important influence on the client. It is the second function that stands out as particularly important in counseling,

In one of our counseling studies we used this procedure to gather data about the counseling process as joint action. But its usefulness as a therapeutic procedure was

evident. Data from this study illustrate a number of the ways in which this method can be used in counseling. In addition, our studies with parents and youth exemplify how this method is useful to examine the action between transition partners, for example, parents and youth, when these partners are both present in counseling. In counseling, the self-confrontation procedure can be implemented in two ways, which we will describe in more detail later. First, immediately following the counseling session, the counselor plays back a segment of the video-recording of the session. In this case, the counselor acts as the interviewer in the self-confrontation. Another option is to have a co-therapist conduct the self-confrontation interview (Maillart & Michel, 2009).

The self-confrontation procedure can serve the client and counselor in counseling as well as the client in his or her life outside of counseling in a number of distinct ways. The self-confrontation procedure allows the flow of the narratives to be preserved within the counseling session, while in the self-confrontation interpersonal and intrapersonal processes can be highlighted. In the self-confrontation, clients can become aware of themselves as the constructor of the narrative, actually seeing themselves as agents in their life history. The client can also become more aware of the processes that he or she is engaged in, for example, "I did not realize I was doing this or that," "Looking at it again, it occurs to me that I thought this or that at the time." Recognizing or grasping emerging self-realizations is also possible in the self-confrontation procedure. It can be used for self-generated or counselor-generated comparisons, for example, "what I am doing doesn't seem consistent with my goals, values or identity." The self-confrontation interview can also serve as feedback to clients whereby they realize that their dramatic inner experience is not at all visible to others, for example, "It is interesting to see that I am sitting there seemingly relaxed but I was very tense and nervous. I thought that it must be visible for miles but it is not." The client can be provided with a space in the self-confrontation to allow an emotion which had arisen during the counseling session and which was suppressed at that time to become fully conscious and developed. For example, a client may say, "I did not know that it would move me after all these years." While the client may have fought the emotion during the session, she reported this with an emotionally laden voice and tears in her eyes not present during the counseling session. The emotional impact of certain emotional-threatening situations or contents can be reduced by supporting clients as they are repeatedly exposed to them in the self-confrontation, a classical procedure of cognitive–behavioral therapy of phobias and posttraumatic stress disorder (Foa, Keane, & Friedman, 2008).

The self-confrontation procedure provides an opportunity for the cognitive reworking of emotional experiences, that is, addressing the thoughts in a targeted emotional process can help to weaken these emotions. This procedure may also contribute to unpacking the relationship between the counselor and the client and the processes between them. Finally, the self-confrontation procedure also has some parallels to mindfulness (Hayes & Wilson, 2003) in that it creates a situation in which the client is repeatedly asked to become aware of his thoughts and feelings. In addition, by expecting the client to attend to his or her own mental state as viewed

on the video, it could also be said to approximate mentalizing (Allen & Fonagy, 2006), if the video representation of oneself is considered as other. Each of these ways in which the self-confrontation procedure can be used can now be described and illustrated in more detail. Finally, it helps in creating a branching narrative with many side stories, which is not possible to achieve at one take in the therapy session. The path of the action and project narrative, following either a time-line or an emotional quality, or very often a combination of both, is limited to a certain width and depth within the counseling session. However, our brains produce many more ideas and attend to many more feelings than represented in a one-time narrative. Going over the first story using the self-confrontation interview allows us to branch out following other paths of actions.

This list of the contributions of the self-confrontation interview to the counseling process – be it in providing information on subjective processes, information on actions and events omitted in original actions or narratives, or its intervention capacity – is only a brief outline. The paragraphs below provide specific examples from our counseling studies. Some examples rely on the text of the self-confrontation interview; other examples are complemented with the text from the counseling sessions itself to which the self-confrontation interview is related.

As an Agent in Narrative Construction

In the following self-confrontation interview, the client recognized that she often talked to others about work because in those conversations she was able to tell a story that revealed aspects of who she is, and she can construct, in that moment, an image of herself with the listener to impress with them. Even in her self-confrontation interview, she starts talking with the research interviewer about her job:

> . . .but I can't stop talking about my work sometimes because it is a, it's interesting and I want people to know about it and maybe they can appreciate what I do, um so . . . you know. Sometimes I'll talk about that just because I wanted to impress people I guess.

Awareness of Processes in Which the Client Is Engaged

The self-confrontation interview provides an opportunity for the client to become more aware of, and to articulate the processes that he or she is actually engaged in. For example, in this case the client articulated early in the self-confrontation, her clarity about the goals for counseling:

> Like I already (laughing) know what I need to do. I've known it for a long time. I just need to do it but like in my head it's just like I don't know I guess, like I said, like I don't know [how to implement the change she wants].

The client returned to state the challenge of the goal of change in her life later in the same self-confrontation procedure:

> Oh yeah yeah yeah . . . we're going onwards, like, no no I don't want to go back but it's just like I just don't want to go forward yet. Like I don't know, like I'm kind of like procrastinating.

Highlighting Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Processes

The self-confrontation procedure allows the client to reflect on the narrative that he or she provided in counseling. It is not simply a matter of identifying the emotional content that is present in the narrative itself, but also the emotion connected to the process of narrating the story. For example, in this self-confrontation, the client reflects on her feelings about telling the story of her use and abuse of street drugs to the counselor:

> Um, probably more disappointment in myself, you know. Like that's like you know I'm talking about going okay yeah I did all that and like the last one – okay I did all of that and everyone's like proud you know . . . You know? And then now it's just like okay now I'm back. Like I know I'm not back to where I was before but it's like to me like I want to improve like this (gestures with her hand up as in assigning a high level) like this? And it's like (gestures with her hand lower) you know what I mean?: It's not going as fast as I wanted . . . and I'm disappointed that. . . : you know? And I'm not going as fast as I'd like to go in life.

In the following excerpt, the same client was able to become more acutely aware of the dissonance she experienced even in telling the story to the counselor between her self-perceptions and how others perceive her:

> I kind of laughed – I just laughed in my head because I was just like – like so many people tell me that, that, you know, "oh you're so courageous and this or that." But it's like I, like, I said there like it's not – like I don't think it is because I don't like I just I'm like still within my comfort zone. Otherwise I wouldn't be doing it.

In the following excerpt from her self-confrontation, a different client acknowledged that she was surprised that she opened up so easily to the counselor about her relationship with her parents and what it was like for her when her parents separated when she was a teenager and caught in the middle of their disputes. She indicated her comfort in sharing this information with the counselor, as she perceived it to be part of her reason for her current career confusion:

> Um, I was feeling um I was feeling good because it felt good to talk about that. . . .
> Because I don't um – I don't bring up my parents' divorce very often anymore because it has been so long. Since it was first started, so I don't talk about it a lot. Um, it felt good to um to say what I was saying.

Recognizing and Grasping Emerging Self-Realizations

In this example, the client was struggling with issues of identity – to be able to be the person at home that she was when she lived away from home. The self-confrontation

gave her an opportunity to realize and reiterate that she wanted to be the person that she was when she was away from home:

Counseling session	Self-confrontation
Client: Yeah, that is why I want to change here. I don't want to leave her until – like I don't think I should be away from my home [*Counselor*: Uh hm.] in order to be like how I really am. You know what I mean? Like I should . . . not even how I am but how I want to be – like how I think I should be	*Client*: . . .I shouldn't have to be away from home to be like that, you know, I don't want to leave here until I'm like that, until I get that back

In another example, the client recognized that in telling the counselor about her intention to apply for a certain job, she actually moved the goal from one that was thought about to one that she was going to implement. The opportunity to say this in the self-confrontation solidifies her premeditated plan somewhat:

> Um yeah, when I was talking to [the counselor] about applying for [names job], I haven't actually talked to anybody about it so I, you know like, it was kind of at that moment that I-I thought about it, you know, in my head I haven't talked about it but in that when I talked about it like I'm actually going to do it now, kind of.

In the following case, the client verbalized her realization that the counseling she is participating in was broader than a search for a suitable job; that it involves her whole life. She also explicitly articulated her emotions about what she had said:

Counseling session	Self-confrontation
So you know and – and I've always – I've always thought okay I'm 15 – I'm going to be 16, so I would tell people I'm going to be 16. I'm going to be 17. And then um – so I've always kind of felt grown up. And now all of a sudden I'm thinking, "Oh my god, wait a minute, I don't want to be grown up. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with my life." (laughing) Where am I going? (laughing) You know? So, I don't know I feel like a lot of the childhood issues are suddenly coming a little up to the surface, you know? I can see them kind of coming up a little bit. But in terms of trying to figure out what to do with my life	Um, I was thinking definitely um confused. Um, but I was feeling like um ah I was – I was having a lot of trouble expressing um why I was feeling – or why that whole – the whole issue from childhood were coming up. So, I think there was a lot of confusion about how to say it um . . . properly. Or in a way that made sense. . . . I was wanting to be more clear, but I was – it wasn't even clear in my – my head. I think there was also a little bit of realization um just at why I had brought up my aunt and thinking, "Okay, this is why." Because I'm – I'm really looking at my life. Um, in a really general sense. so, maybe yeah maybe a little bit of realization. . . . Right there

During the following self-confrontation, the client noted that he felt his comment about disappointing his parents came out in the conversation with the counselor

and yet was misunderstood. He stated that he felt he was unable to clarify for the counselor what he meant:

> I think at the beginning of just this segment . . . when I said, you know, I'd feel bad disappointing my parents. I think as soon as I said that I realized that like . . . that I didn't really . . . phrase it the right way. Like just saying that wasn't exactly what I meant. . . . And then I felt like the next . . . like 10 minutes . . . well I was trying to explain you know it's not that I feel like I'm going to disappoint them or anything like that. It's just sort of one of the things that I don't want to do you know. I don't want to . . . make bad choices and stuff like that.

The Counselor–Client Relationship

In this self-confrontation, the client is able to reflect on her feelings about the process when there was an extended period of silence between the counselor and the client:

> Hm, I felt lots of emotion that time. . . . Especially after no one had anything to say. That was like, I don't know, it was kind of awkward. Especially like she (the counselor) didn't know where to go and I didn't know where else to go. So I was like okay just kind of waiting for something to happen (laughing).

This client was able to express her intention in the counseling process as well as co-occurring feelings – one feeling being the sadness that she was experiencing and expressing as she spoke with the counselor, the other feeling was the embarrassment about telling the story that she was able to access in the self-confrontation interview:

> Umm . . . thought process-wise, I was hoping that I can stop crying. . . . Because yeah I was, I-I-I don't know, I guess it was kind of embarrassing that I was crying upon the first meeting with [names counselor] so. . . . Yeah I wasn't really comfortable with what I was feeling.

In this self-confrontation, the client expressed feeling deeply understood by the counselor:

> Yeah. Um I felt she was completely understanding. She was totally relating. Um or relaying back to me um what was – what the situation was um with regards to kind of being more independent. So, it felt like um she was understanding what I was trying to get across, right? Sometimes it's hard to – to spit out what you're really thinking.

Addressing Strong Emotions

The notion of emotional memory is quite important in counseling. The self-confrontation procedure can provide the opportunity for the client to access emotional memory as is illustrated in the following case in which a client described a work situation in which she was the only contact with a young girl trapped in an elevator. The client identified this incident as the closest she came to having a mental breakdown, but only briefly discussed the event with her boyfriend after it happened. Part of what she said to the counselor follows:

> Oh yeah, I want a situation that is better at work so I don't have to feel so stressed out, um. I've cried once before about it, this is the second time. I don't usually talk about work, that's the thing, to anybody. Um, the previous instance I was, that was the closest thing to a mental breakdown I had at work actually, um [sighs]. It was in the scenario where there was absolutely nothing I could have done but something was still expected from me. And [sighs] it was an elevator call actually, in some elevators you see that [the] help button, uh, so in case you are stuck at the elevator you push that. . .
>
> She kept screaming at me, "I need my daddy" and I was telling her, "Please give me the address," right? She didn't understand it, and I, you know and I enquired about her father, you know, in Mandarin, you know, she just kept screaming and yelling about daddy. So very stressful for me.
>
> Fortunately after about ten minutes, I mean the phone hangs up on us every two minutes, but she, – she'll keep pressing it right, so I was able to get her back on line and fortunately someone I guess from the outside was able to open the door. He was saying "Oh, my God, are you OK?" so I heard, you know, there was another person there. I was like God. . .

In the self-confrontation interview that followed, the client recalled her feeling at this moment of the counseling:

> I was extremely sad. . . . Remembering the story cos I don't know like we've all been lost before right? When we were a child . . . And I there was this one incident when I was a kid I got lost and when I was relaying the story [about the girl in the elevator to the counselor] I would kinda remember that. . . . I was feeling like that when I was actually dealing with you know. . . . But then repeating the story out loud I was [Interviewer: Feeling it again, yeah?] Yeah.

Desensitization

The self-confrontation interview can also be a vehicle for desensitizing clients from strong emotional reactions when the action related to the emotion is harmful or not functional. Desensitization is based on the principle of gradually introducing noxious stimuli in situations where the client can cope with them more readily (Wolpe, 1990). In this case, the client is able to see strong emotional reactions and begin the process of desensitization. Some indicate that the strong feelings were actualized and thus the exposure has started:

> It is interesting to realize that the strong feeling which I felt during the session occurs in the same way when watching the video.

Other clients report a desensitization effect soon after the self-confrontation interview began:

> It does not touch me as much because I have talked about it already in the session. Now I can pay attention more to the way how I talked about it.

Experiencing Strength and Competence

Viewing the self-confrontation interview can sometimes represent a challenge for the client, but a challenge under the supervision of the therapist. For example, some

clients were challenged by their dissatisfaction with their voice or appearance. Other clients report experiencing themselves as being able to stand up to this challenge as a sign of their strength and rising competence:

> I am quite surprised how well I am doing. How can I talk about all my problems to people I do not know well, such as you. I am sure that I will manage.
> I am surprised how much I was able to say during the session. I did not realize that while talking.

Experiencing Getting Hurt Before Feeling Better

The self-confrontation interview provides a neutral means of confronting the client with unpleasant experiences and facts. It is neutral in the sense that it is not the counselor who has to point out or bring up these issues but a simple replay of the session. Two examples of client self-confrontation statements reflecting this relationship are as follows:

> To talk about my problems and seeing it again on the video is not a joy for me. However, perhaps experiencing something difficult is needed in order to get better.

> Sometimes it is disturbing to hear oneself but, on the other hand, it is good to hear oneself. I had learned here that I have to cope with it.

Improved, More Positive Feelings

Many clients report spontaneously that after the session and particularly after the self-confrontation interview they feel much better, for example,

> I have to say that I feel much better. I was able to talk about my problems and get rid of them.

> This helped me a lot. I am glad that I met you.

Challenges to Using the Self-Confrontation

Some clients have less awareness of their internal processes and seem uncomfortable with the self-confrontation process. This may be the case particularly with some younger clients who cannot easily identify processes distinct from what they had said in the counseling session or other conversations. For example, in the self-confrontation after the first counseling session, one client commented:

Client:	I don't know how to explain my feelings. (laughing) I don't think. I don't know.
Research Interviewer:	What was going on in your head? Like in terms of thinking. What was happening?
Client:	Like I don't know it's a hard question. Like I was just kind of like explaining my story. (laughing)

Later in the same self-confrontation session, the client reiterated her difficulty identifying her thoughts and feelings during the counseling:

> . . .I was just like speaking my mind; I didn't have separate thoughts (laughing) I don't know.

The same client also highlighted the difficulty of recalling feelings in the self-confrontation, which, of course, is information that is quite useful to the counselor:

> Um, I was just like I don't know I was just like I don't know I kind of like just like neutral. (laughing) Like neutral this is what I gotta do kind of thing. I don't know like I was just feeling I don't know (laughing). I don't know like – I don't know is it possible just to feel nothing? I was just kinda like telling how it was, you know? So I was I don't know how to explain my feelings on that part.

Some other clients report their dislike of engaging in the self-confrontation interview, particularly when they addressed difficult and disturbing episodes of their life such as a suicide attempt.

> It disturbs me to have to go through it again and again. It is very embarrassing for me what had happened.

Introducing the Self-Confrontation Procedure

In counseling, the self-confrontation procedure is used directly for the client's benefit. It is not intended to provide additional biographical information for the counselor. In introducing the self-confrontation, the client has to be invited to participate as one who is an agent in his or her own life. For example, the counselor might introduce the self-confrontation to the client in the following way.

In this counseling session you have been involved in telling me the story of how you became alienated from your family and I have been involved in listening to it. It may be useful at this stage to consider the process you engaged in when telling your story. We could do this by playing back a 10–15-min segment of the video we made of this session. In doing this, I will stop the video every minute or so to ask you to recall your thoughts and feelings at the moment of counseling we have just seen on video. You can also stop the video any time you want to say something about what you have seen. Of course, you are very much in charge of this procedure and can stop it at any moment. Parts of watching yourself may feel a bit uncomfortable, but we have found that most people who have experienced this procedure have found it helpful. Do you have any questions? . . . Can we start?

After showing the first segment we can repeat the simple request, "I would appreciate your telling me your thoughts and feelings at the moment of counseling we have just seen on video." If the client answers by addressing thoughts or feelings to the exclusion of the other, the interviewer could say, for example, "You have told me what you were thinking at that time we just saw of the video, can you recall how you were feeling?" Similarly, the interviewer can engage the client in amplifying

and clarifying thoughts and feelings with such responses as, “Can you tell me more about feeling disappointed?”

Dealing with the Novelty and Shyness

Occasionally some clients may comment about their appearance or their voice for example, “I am not used to seeing myself on video. My voice sounds different. But it is not unpleasant.” Others may express strong dissatisfaction, for example, “It’s painful to watch myself.” However, many of these clients become engaged in the process once they have expressed their initial concern. It may be helpful to recognize the clients’ feeling at this moment, validate them in order to turn their attention to the ongoing processes and away from appearance considerations. But noticing appearance considerations may be significant, depending on issues the client is addressing in counseling. Of course, it remains in the client’s purview to continue or discontinue with a self-confrontation interview. As well, the counselor has to make ongoing clinical judgments about the suitability of the procedure.

Various Clients’ Understanding of the Task in the Self-Confrontation Interview

As indicated above, the range of the clients’ way of dealing with the task of self-confrontation is extensive. They sometimes repeat the information given in the target actions or maintain that there is nothing to talk about. At other times they contextualize in some way the information provided in the session or their actions or behaviors displayed in the session. This could be a situational context of an action, either displayed or reported in the session, a personal, biographical, relational, or other context. However, most of the time the task is well understood and the thoughts and feelings occurring during the video-recorded session are reported.

Prompting for Thoughts and Feelings

After the client has stopped sharing thoughts and feeling and providing other information, the counselor can support the client in speaking about the target internal processes in pointing out some behaviors such as “You seem to be restless here. What were you thinking and feeling?” “You are picking at your sleeve while saying this. Was it difficult to talk about it?” “You paused in describing that moment. What were you thinking and feeling then?” “You are talking about a difficult time in your life and seem to be composed and even smiling. Was that how you felt?”

Conclusion

One reason for engaging in the self-confrontation interview in counseling and therapy goes far beyond its therapeutic impact. The self-confrontation interview is a necessary tile in the mosaic of knowledge and action. In the counseling context, this mosaic includes understanding the problem and the therapeutic action. We know that a respectful and supportive relationship and an emphatic interviewing style are important factors linked to therapeutic outcome. The client's narratives and the personal experiences behind such narratives are also significant. The self-confrontation interview engages the client in recalling personal thoughts and feelings. It also relies on the social meaning of the processes that engage the client at the narrative level as well.

The second reason for stressing the importance of self-confrontation interview is in order to pay more attention to the processes clients are engaged in. The professional discussions and psychological research of the last 40 years have shown that relying solely on clients' unchangeable and stable personal features for understanding and supporting the client change are not as effective as was hoped they would be. There is a certain wisdom in the saying, "one is what one does." Thus, in our approach to counseling we are interested in engaging clients in joint actions, be it with persons with whom the client has important relationships such as parents or be it in the encounter with the counselor. The way to be successful in therapeutic work is to attend to both the processes in which clients enfold and develop their relational and narrative strategies and to the processes of the self-confrontation. Both these sets of processes are embedded and contextualized in social meaning of both client and counselor, and provide the necessary means of successful counseling work. Important aspects of intervening with clients occur during the counseling encounter and the subsequent self-confrontation interview. In turn, these processes provide the counselor with information and clients with experience that contribute significantly to the next stages of counseling.

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