

Career Construction Counselling with Women Through a Feminist Lens



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Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to consider the use of career construction counselling with women through a feminist counselling lens. To gain a clearer understanding of the significance of the topic, the first part of the chapter begins with an overview of the global gender gap, especially in relation to work. Additionally, the authors provide a case study to offer context and facilitate application of concepts throughout the chapter. The second part of the chapter provides information regarding various career barriers faced by women, and applies that information to the case study in an effort to sensitize readers to potential issues. The third part of the chapter attends to feminist counselling and the imperative to understand and honor intersectionality, and again applies this information to the case study. The fourth part integrates a feminist counselling lens with career construction for women and helps the reader consider implications regarding the case study, after which the chapter is concluded.

Keywords Career construction · Career counselling · Feminist counselling · Women's career issues · Women's career barriers

Introduction

While feminist theories are highly diverse and complex, there are two foundational themes of feminist counselling. The first is that the personal is political, which means that personal problems are connected to, and influenced by, the socio-political climate (Enns, 2004). This is aligned with the career construction theoretical principle that individuals construct their careers not solely based on the “self” but also within the context of their social world (Savickas, 2013a). Because career development intimately connects to, and is influenced by, socio-political (and oppressive) systems, it

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is understandable women would experience unique issues. The second theme of feminist counselling is that issues and symptoms are often coping mechanisms that have arisen in response to dealing with oppression (Enns, 2004). Since personal issues and career issues are rarely, if ever, separate, the coping mechanisms women may employ in dealing with oppression likely intertwine with career development issues. As such, it can be useful to address the career construction of women through a feminist lens that helps one to consider implicit bias and systemic oppression, especially during the deconstruction and co-construction processes of career construction counselling.

Global Gender Gap and Workforce Participation Trends

A broad overview of the global gender gap provides context for the significance of women's work issues in today's world. Based on current trends, the World Economic Forum (2017) calculated that the global gender gap could be closed in 100 years across 106 countries. This is an alarming trend compared to 83 years based on the previous year's report. The World Economic Forum contends economic and health gaps are the most challenging of the four gender gaps measured (economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment). Disappointingly, the economic gender gap has widened for two consecutive years and it stands at its lowest value (as measured by the Index) since 2008 resulting in estimates that it could take 217 years for it to close.

Closing the economic gender gap could result in substantially positive outcomes for the global community because "ensuring the healthy development and appropriate use of half of the world's total talent pool has a vast bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of economies and businesses worldwide" (World Economic Forum, 2017, pp. 26–27). Indeed, according to the McKinsey Global Institute (2015), full global gender parity in the economy could equate to a US\$28 trillion addition to the annual global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2025 as compared to current conditions. The report further indicated that even if countries just matched the rate of improvement in gender parity in the best performing country in their region, it could add US\$12 trillion in annual GDP.

However, while female labor force participation rates worldwide have increased in most countries since 1980, recent trends have shown that this global trend has only increased from 50.2 to 51.8%, and some estimates from the International Labor Organization (ILO) show that the global trend is negative (Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017). According to Ortiz-Ospina and Tzvetkova (2017), this negative trend is primarily because of diminished workforce participation in some world regions, most notably in South and East Asia. Globally, the labor force participation ratio of females to males in 2016 was approximately 67.5%, meaning for every 100 males in the workforce, there were 67.5 females (The World Bank, 2017). This disparity is highly variable with some countries, such as Burundi or Mozambique having more females than males in the labor force, and others, such as Afghanistan or Algeria, having less

than a 25% ratio of females to males in the workforce (The World Bank, 2017). This does not mean that women are working less, though.

Ortiz-Ospina and Tzvetkova (2017) delved deeply into ILO data and determined that women, more often than men, tend to work in the informal economy. They advised that this is an important point given that policies and laws tend to favor those working in the formal economy. Furthermore, given that informal workers “represent the majority of workers and enterprises in developing countries,” (WIEGO, n.d., para. 2) one must also consider intersectionality and thus the multiple points of oppression many women encounter. Additionally, women spend more time than men on unpaid domestic care work (e.g., care of people, housework, and voluntary community work) all over the world, with the low end of the spectrum (Uganda) showing women working 18% more than men on these activities, and the high end (India) indicating they work 10 times more (Ortiz-Ospina & Tzvetkova, 2017). Obviously, multiple layers of complexity accompany women’s participation rates in the workforce as a whole. Further, the individual perspectives of women, their cultural and contextual backgrounds, their points of privilege and of oppression, and the intertwining of these facets with career issues can complicate matters further.

Case Study: Introducing Julia

Following is a brief introduction to a case study referred to throughout this chapter. To maintain anonymity, Julia is a composite of a variety of individuals with whom the authors have had the fortune to work. It is our hope that she will help illuminate the information presented in this chapter in a realistic and useful manner.

Julia is a 34-year-old Latina in the United States who identifies as a woman of color, and is heterosexual and cisgender. She worked as a certified Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA) for approximately five years prior to having children. She had planned to return to school to earn her Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and either return to the field as a registered physical therapist, or perhaps become a professor. However, upon having their first child, she and her husband decided she would stay home with the children while he continued to work full-time.

The children are now ages three and five and Julia is experiencing some confusion and anxiety regarding her life-career. She states that she loves her children, wants to be there for them, and does not want to “miss out on this time in their lives.” However, she has found that being a full-time stay-at-home parent has not been as rewarding as she thought it would be. She misses her professional life as a PTA, and her dream of returning to school has continued. However, she reports that she feels pressure to stay home with the children.

Her husband has indicated that having a second income would be beneficial if Julia were to return to her job as a PTA, but she states he is not particularly supportive of her returning to school. Julia knows that if she were to return to work or school it would be an adjustment for both her and her husband in terms of renegotiating parenting and household labor roles. Additionally, both her parents and her husband’s

parents have questioned the wisdom of Julia returning to work, let alone school, until both children are in school for full days. However, they have stated that if she were to do so, they would be available to help with childcare because they do not want their grandchildren “raised by strangers.” Julia feels shame about this idea, and is not sure how she would manage all of her roles and responsibilities at the level she thinks she should if she were to return to work or follow her dream of obtaining her DPT.

Career Barriers for Women

In a study with working professionals, Mate and Ryan (2015) found women, more than men, referred to overcoming barriers and building resilience, and they suggested that “women may require greater resilience than men over their careers” (p. 157). Women can encounter numerous barriers and obstacles in their career lives and providing a full literature review of those barriers is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, the authors have attempted to provide some recent studies as an overview of issues that are relatable to Julia’s situation.

Julia’s identity as a mother is obviously an issue in terms of her career and educational decisions. Career barriers present themselves for women with children since, typically, women are expected to be the primary childcare provider. Oh (2018) found in interviewing mothers in South Korea that while those who sought support for child care received it, they had to construct “a legitimate reason” (p. 494). According to Oh, this “deservingness” points to how maternal employment is negatively viewed, and thus mothers must make justifications for working. These mothers, overall, did not believe that they had an innate entitlement to work and receive support with childcare, and their interactions with husbands, parents, and parents-in-law were influential in the process of whether the mother determined her work was worthy of the support. Julia may think her career and educational goals are not worthy of the support she will need with parenting. Furthermore, it appears her husband, parents, and parents-in-law are influencing her thoughts and feelings.

While the South Korean mothers in the aforementioned study utilized their children’s grandmothers for childcare, this is not an option for many mothers. Thus, the need to secure a job that allows for *caring security*, which “signifies the outcome of job conditions that assure continuity of safe and predictable care arrangements, including regular and smooth daily transfers of responsibility between parents and alternative care providers” (Carney & Junor, 2014, p. 466) can present another career obstacle for women. In fact, Carney and Junor (2014) found in their study using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) survey (2001–2005) that there tended to be greater concentrations of mothers in occupations that allowed for a combination of both caring and career security.

Julia’s family indicated they will provide childcare support, but they have done so in a way that has reinforced the idea that Julia is not a good mother if she obtains childcare outside of the family. Furthermore, it appears that Julia is expected to be the

primary coordinator of childcare. Thus, options that provide the greatest opportunity for caring security may influence her decision to return to work or school.

Gender stereotypes and occupational segregation abound in the world of work and likely serve as gatekeepers to multiple opportunities, such as the STEM fields of computer science and engineering (Cheryan, Master, & Meltzoff, 2015). Gender stereotypes are not limited to the STEM fields, but are also evident in liberal arts. Buhr and Sideras (2015) found that students in International Relations courses tended to provide predictable gender-stereotyped lists of subfields in which they thought males or females would be more interested (e.g., human rights = female; military policy = male). However, their own interests did not necessarily follow their gender assumptions. The United Nations (2015) asserted that “occupational segregation of women and men continues to be deeply embedded in all [world] regions” (p. 87). Stereotypes also likely hold women back in their career progression with women being underrepresented in advanced degree programs, especially in science-related fields where women only constitute 30% of researchers worldwide (United Nations, 2015), and in senior level management positions where they comprised only 24% of senior roles worldwide in 2018 (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2018, March).

Julia has long had a desire to return to school and obtain an advanced degree in the healthcare field. She has even had thoughts of becoming a professor at a university where she could not only teach others to become physical therapists, but where her research efforts could advance the field. It is possible that some of the pressures she is facing at home, and from society-at-large, are gender stereotypes regarding what she is supposed to be as a mother, especially a Latina mother. These stereotypes may have been at play when Julia made her original educational and career choices to become a physical therapy assistant (which typically requires a two-year associate’s degree in the United States).

Equal pay for equal work also continues to be an obstacle facing women. For example, while occupations in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields provide potentially higher-paying jobs, women continue to be underrepresented, constituting only 24% of those employed in STEM occupations in the United States in 2015 (Noonan, 2017, November). Furthermore, Noonan (2017, November) reported that while women in STEM jobs tend to earn 35% more than women in non-STEM jobs, and that the gender wage gap is smaller in STEM versus non-STEM jobs, the wage gap is still at 16%, meaning that for every dollar a man earns, a woman earns 84 cents. This gender pay gap extends beyond the United States with the United Kingdom and other mainland European countries reporting wage gaps averaging around 20% (Fleming, 2018).

While her husband is supportive of Julia’s return to work, her overall pay as a physical therapy assistant is less than what she would earn if she obtained her DPT and became a physical therapist or a professor for a physical therapy program. Additionally, should Julia become a physical therapist, she would find that while the gender wage gap is smaller in this STEM field, according to statistics from the United States Census Bureau (2016) she would still possibly earn only 87.6% of what men earn as a physical therapist. Furthermore, given that Julia is Latina, it is reasonable

to surmise she would earn even less given that Hispanic and Latina women average 62.1% of what White men earn overall (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Another barrier for women's career-lives is overcoming gender-based work requests that can put them at a disadvantage in their careers. O'Meara, Kuvaeva, Nyunt, Waugaman, and Jackson (2017) found that male faculty at a set of 13 large research universities in the United States spent more than twice as much time on research than did women, whereas women spent more time than men on campus service, student advising, and teaching-related activities. These women faculty members also received more work requests overall, and for areas not related to research. Similarly, Pifer (2018) discovered that women faculty were connected with more for teaching-related purposes than for research purposes. Furthermore, El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar (2018) found that female professors reported more requests from students for standard work demands such as office hour time, as well as for special favors such as being allowed to re-do an assignment, than did male professors. Should Julia realize her goal of becoming a professor at a university, these are potential obstacles to her future career and she would likely need good mentorship and strong allies to support her along her journey.

Fortunately, women have demonstrated adaptability in overcoming obstacles, as well as turning challenges into opportunities. McMahon, Watson, and Bimrose (2012) found evidence of career adaptability during transition periods as well as other aspects of their careers in women 45–65 years old from Australia, England, and South Africa. Similarly, Whiston, Feldwisch, Evans, Blackman, and Gilman (2015) reported that professional women over the age of 50 in the United States described themes regarding career adaptability within their current and future projected career-related tasks, transitions, and traumas. Additionally, Marine and Martínez Alemán (2018) found themes that suggested that women faculty from their study who had achieved tenure in higher education found it to be liberating and subsequently, “an opportunity to challenge traditional gender norms and discourse in the academy” (p. 229).

Feminist Counselling and Intersectionality

The complexity, diversity, and variations of feminist counselling are far beyond the scope of this chapter. Feminist counselling is not tied to a specific theoretical approach, nor a set of techniques, but it does have feminism at its foundation which “provides an umbrella framework, or a set of values for evaluating and orienting practice” (Enns, 2004, p. 8). Feminism seeks to end “all forms of domination, oppression, and privilege that intersect with sexism and gender bias, including (but not limited to) racism, classism, colonialism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, white supremacy, ageism, and ableism” (Enns, 2004, p. 8). We, the authors of this chapter, assert that in defining feminism in this manner, multicultural career counselling competence is critical and brings intersectionality to the fore.

Intersectionality

To be multiculturally competent, career counsellors must look at all aspects which define their clients' experiences. Various identities resulting from one's "gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and religion/spirituality do not exist in separation for individuals, rather, these features are inherently intertwined" (Yakushko, Davidson, & Williams, 2009, p. 180). Since these features interconnect, it is critical to understand that one cannot extract gender from other components of one's identity, and that oppression and discrimination inextricably connect to this dynamic web. Intersectionality theory was first described by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and addressed primarily race and gender (specifically, Black women). Since then, intersectionality has grown to encompass more identities and is currently defined as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Thus, women who hold multiple minority identities have additional and more complex impediments they face which make it difficult to relate to dominant cultural norms, ideologies, and privileges, such as access to political power and material wealth (Yoon, 2016).

Further complicating matters is the understanding that an individual's self-concept is both a source of influence as well as acted upon by each of the ecological systems surrounding that individual (Yakushko et al., 2009). For example, career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations are not only related to one's sense of identity as a scientist, as discovered in a study by Byars-Winston and Rogers (2019), but can also be shaped by privilege based on one's identity. More specifically, Thompson and Dahling (2012) found that gender and socioeconomic privilege predicted one's exposure to learning experiences, which subsequently helped shape self-efficacy and outcome expectations related to career. Additionally, Oh (2018) found that varying levels of education and socioeconomic status among South Korean women were related to differences regarding their *deservingness* to work. In other words, while all of the South Korean mother interviewees held commonalities of gender and motherhood, the kind of work and the status of their jobs contributed to whether they, and others, believed they deserved childcare support. According to Oh, results such as these reinforce the need for research to go beyond need and choice to explain how women of different SES backgrounds account for their work.

Each identity an individual holds is accompanied by varying levels of salience because people typically do not identify with all of their values equally and often are shaped by how various identities are oppressed or allowed to flourish (Yakushko et al., 2009). Additionally, individuals who identify more strongly with a particular group may perform behaviors that are consistent with the group's norm (Kelman, 2006), even if those norms may be inequitable. For example, after their study on tenured White women faculty over the age of 50 and born between 1946 and 1964, Marine and Martínez Alemán (2018) suggested that successful competition in the institution's reward system is determined by women faculty's adoption of the system's values,

even those determined by feminist scholars to be inequitable. Furthermore, for those who hold an oppressed identity, the concern of fulfilling a negative stereotype of their racial or ethnic group (i.e., stereotype threat) may decrease the likelihood of them feeling that they fit in with a particular group (such as a professional group) (Benzeev et al., 2017). Given that women who work within STEM fields already tend to be less likely than men to identify themselves as scientists (Williams & George-Jackson, 2014), the possibility of stereotype threat further influencing a culturally diverse woman to not identify with the scientific community is concerning. Indeed, Beasley and Fischer (2012) found that stereotype threat was a stronger predictor than academic preparation in terms of early departure of historically underrepresented students from STEM majors. Taken together, the results from these studies suggest that not only may it be more difficult for those from the non-majority group to identify with an occupational identity, but also, if they do, they may need to engage with group norms that continue systemic oppression.

In addition to salience of identities and group identification affecting women, the interaction of an individual's various identities within a range of ecological systems may influence one's identity to shift in order to adapt to various environments. These shifts occur since strengths in one culture may be seen as areas of deficit in other cultures (Grothaus, McAuliffe, & Craigen, 2012). Identity shifting, or identity negotiation (see Jackson, 2002; Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013; Ting-Toomey, 2005), includes alterations to behaviors, such as changing one's speech or appearance, or suppressing certain behaviors or actions, to conform to norms within varying environments (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). It may be a conscious act (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Jackson, 2002), or executed unconsciously and automatically, such as when changing one's thinking to better fit in with the dominant group (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Identity shifting can be particularly present in Black women with Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) indicating that 58% of the women in their study reported changing their behaviors so they would be more accepted by White people. In their study on early-career college-educated Black women, Dickens and Chavez (2018) found themes in which the women worked to dismantle stereotypes and felt pressure to positively represent Black people in the workplace. These women wanted to make sure to separate themselves from prevailing stereotypes (Dickens & Chavez, 2018), which is reminiscent of the previously mentioned information regarding stereotype threat. Dickens and Chavez (2018) found that while there were benefits such as adaptability and relatability to peers, identity shifting also came with multiple costs and mixed feelings. Some of these women's sacrifices included distorted self-perception, especially as emerging professionals; removal of themselves from situations or remaining silent to avoid confrontation or future discrimination, thus opting for invisibility and assimilation to norms; and feelings of inauthenticity and perhaps betrayal of one's allegiance to the Black community.

Socio-political-historical context and the way it shapes the meaning of one's identities also demands attention when considering intersectionality. South African Indian women, in a study by Carrim and Nkomo (2016), had difficulties in overcoming the imposed passivity from both their Indian culture as well as the racialization processes of apartheid that had made up their early lives. Furthermore, similar to the

Black women in the study discussed in the previous paragraph, these women had to attend to cues from their White (and male) counterparts and assimilate to the workplace norms, while also experiencing discomfort and angst in not adhering to Indian cultural practices. Ultimately, these women “tried to construct hybrid identities [in their workplaces and their family/community spaces] that resisted the essentializing practices of each” (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016, p. 272).

Considerations regarding Julia. Julia has various intersecting identities, some of which provide her with points of privilege (e.g., cisgender and heterosexual), as well as points of oppression (e.g., ethnically diverse woman of color). It would be important for Julia’s career counsellor to come alongside her to discover the salience of her varying identities within different aspects of her life. Together, Julia and her career counsellor can consider how the context she grew up in, and the one she currently lives in, has shaped who Julia is and how she interacts with the world. For instance, does Julia engage in identity shifting? How has she negotiated the worlds in which she lives, works, and plays?

Multiculturally responsive counsellors are also responsible for navigating their own biases and responses as well as respecting and engaging with Julia on how she, as the expert of her own story, views her situation and context in relation to her own culture. What does Julia consider to be points of oppression? How are those points of oppression exacerbated by her intersecting identities? Recognizing the unique characteristics of Julia in the context of her environment and within the constructs of her cultures, as well as how those are juxtaposed with her socio-political-historical context, is critical and will continue to be addressed in the following section regarding principles of feminist counselling.

Feminist Counselling

Feminist counselling seeks to raise consciousness surrounding social roles and systemic oppressive influences and link these societal influences to individuals’ presenting issues (Popadiuk, 2015). According to Enns (2004), two primary themes categorize the varying assumptions held by feminist counsellors. The first is that the personal is political, which purports that personal problems are often related to the political and social climate in which the individual exists. The second theme is that individuals’ problems or symptoms are not necessarily pathology, but instead are their means of coping and surviving in oppressive circumstances. The connection between individuals’ inner selves and their outer worlds corroborate that the personal is political, and thus institutional changes must occur to match the personal changes that clients make (Enns, 2004). Whalen et al. (2004) recognized that while counsellors can advocate with and for women and minorities, there are many environmental oppressors and it is a large task to combat each of them on a societal level since norms take time to adapt and modernize. They call for counsellors “to be concerned about arming people with effective skills to criticize and effect change in environments” (Whalen et al., 2004, p. 386); thus career counsellors may need to go beyond

typical individual or small group counselling to engage in prevention, education, and advocacy work.

Along with the two primary themes of feminist counselling, Enns (2004) suggested there are core principles relating to the counselling relationship. Relationship principle one, according to Enns, purports that those aligning with feminist counselling do not believe that it is possible to practice values-free counselling. As such, she asserted that counsellors must clarify their values; understand how their values can affect clients; monitor themselves so they do not covertly influence clients; and actively seek to understand the worldviews, values, and experiences of diverse groups. Additionally, Whalen et al. (2004) called for counsellors to value clients' strengths with the understanding that strengths go beyond those traits historically valued in Western male culture such as autonomy, self-determination, and rationalism. Accordingly, career counsellors must broaden their lists of strengths to encompass "traits such as connectedness, intuition, expressiveness, and interdependence... traditionally associated with other cultural experiences" (Whalen et al., 2004, p. 380).

By focusing on client strengths, career counsellors "assume that the client is a capable, strong, healthy person who is currently experiencing a difficulty" (Whalen et al., 2004, p. 380); rather than pathologizing clients, they understand that clients are coping and surviving within the context of their world. This aligns with the second principle of feminist counselling in which counsellors believe that clients are competent and as such, their perspectives must be valued and affirmed, especially given that women's views of their own lives have historically been discounted by the mental health profession (Enns, 2004). Additionally, for far too long, culturally diverse individuals have had their "differences" equated with inferiority and pathology through the process of scientific racism and white supremacy (Sue & Sue, 2016). Counselors that focus on mental and physical health rather than pathology are said to value hygiology, and must challenge themselves to break out of their stereotypes and be inclusive of what optimal functioning may look like for other cultures and identities (Whalen et al., 2004). It is also critical that counsellors give heed to the importance of person-environment interactions by closely considering the multiple systems in which individuals live, with which they interact, and through which they are influenced. In understanding their clients' lens, counsellors can be better aware of environments and systems that reinforce stereotypes, perpetuate oppression, and shape various forms of interactions (Whalen et al., 2004).

By affirming clients as the expert on themselves, a more egalitarian relationship (relationship principle three) can be formed, but the feminist counsellor must be careful to not discount inherent power and role differences that exist in the counselling relationship (Enns, 2004). To mitigate this, Enns suggested that the feminist counsellor model to the client an awareness of power dynamics, as well as how to reduce power differentials and effectively navigate differing roles. Furthermore, in facilitating an egalitarian relationship, the counsellor must attend to the fourth principle guiding the feminist counselling relationship, which concerns the counselling contract and informed consent. Counselors that help clients understand their approach and why they make various choices facilitate a client-counsellor partnership (Enns, 2004). Clear goals allow for both counsellor and client to evaluate progress, and

ongoing informed consent based in collaboration and information sharing can result in a greater likelihood of genuine autonomous consent (Brown, 1994; Enns, 2004). Ultimately, goals, processes, and outcomes of feminist counselling include valuing and affirming diversity; counselling for change, not adjustment; equality; balancing instrumental and relational strengths; helping clients find and use their own power; social change; and self-nurturance (Enns, 2004).

Considerations regarding Julia. In considering Julia, the feminist career counsellor with multicultural competencies would take the approach that Julia's issues are not the result of something being wrong with her, but instead, that her confusion and anxiety are in response to the oppressive systems and environments in which she lives. The career counsellor must gain additional insight into Julia's values and salient identities as well as her perspectives on her situation so as not to inadvertently make assumptions or impose the counsellor's values onto Julia. Juxtaposing these insights alongside the exploration of both overt and covert oppressive messaging she is receiving (and has received over her lifetime) could raise new understandings for Julia. Then, collaborating with Julia in an egalitarian relationship using culturally appropriate methods to facilitate the use of her strengths and resources can assist Julia in reclaiming her own power to move forward in the manner she deems most appropriate.

Career Construction Counselling with Women

From Matching to Managing to Meaning-Making

Vocational guidance, which involves matching people to jobs (albeit more complex than that), first dominated the field of career counselling and was followed by the paradigm of career education, which helps individuals develop attributes necessary to accomplish career developmental tasks and manage their career and life roles over the life span (Hartung, 2013; Savickas, 2012). While these two waves of career theories and interventions have guided the field of career counselling for much of its history, and continue to be important and useful, they are no longer enough (Savickas, 2013b). Today's world of rapid and constant change means that reference points that shape one's roles and routines, including those of one's work life, are fluid and uncertain, leaving individuals without frameworks of what would be considered a normal way of life (Guichard, 2015). In this era of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2007), the field of career development and counselling had to shift to keep up with societal demands that require individuals to find their own paths and ways of being that provide them with meaning.

The intervention of [career] *counselling* [emphasis added] focuses clients' reflection on themes in their career story and then extends the themes into the future. It may recognize similarity, and it may promote readiness, yet counselling mainly uses reflexive process and

thematic content to design a life. It is about uniqueness more than resemblance and emotion more than reasoning. (Savickas, 2013b, p. 653)

Traditional models of career development often lack consideration of sociocultural variables such as immigration status, impact of sex and racial discrimination, and educational barriers, which are critical to identities of women and minorities (Whalen et al., 2004). Additionally, societal values, customs, and norms provide implicit cues about appropriate and inappropriate career paths for women, thus creating a macro system that perpetuates stereotypes and myths about what it means to be a girl or woman at work (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2005). Furthermore, because "career education rests on a predictable trajectory of developmental tasks" and "relates to predictability, stability, and societal expectations" (Busacca & Reh fuss, 2017, p. 32), one cannot assume that career education is of equal value for all people since this so-called predictable trajectory is often more relevant to those with privilege. The shift towards career counselling to find uniqueness versus similarities may be especially useful for women as it honors their unique strengths and experiences rather than continually comparing them to a White male majority standard (Peila-Shuster, 2017).

Career Construction Counselling

Identity is not a stable entity, but instead involves how individuals think of the self in relation to their social roles (Savickas, 2012) and is a "fluid developmental resource that updates in context" (Pouyaud, 2015, p. 63). Savickas (2012) further noted that identity imposes meaning on vocational behavior and work activities. Similarly, Gibson (2004) suggested "each of us is unavoidably always in the process of choosing who to become in terms of the projects through which we bring an identity into being" (p. 179). These projects are elucidated through career construction counselling, which utilizes micronarratives to construct one's macro narrative (Savickas, 2013a). Narrative approaches to career counselling, such as career construction, assists clients to move away from thinking about themselves and their decisions in terms of roles or occupations and instead helps clients to understand themselves through a lens of meaning (Gibson, 2004). According to Yoon (2016), storytelling describes how individuals see the world and their various identities, and it uses specific language that resonates with them. Moreover, narrative approaches have similar processes and goals as feminist counselling in that they work towards helping clients attend to, deconstruct, and confront limiting cultural messages (Enns, 2017).

The process of career construction counselling involves the activities of construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, coconstruction, and action (Savickas, 2013a). [For step-by-step instructions regarding how to conduct the Career Construction Interview and reconstruct the client's responses into a macro narrative, please see the *Life Design Counselling Manual* by Savickas (2015).] In the construction phase, the career counsellor utilizes the Career Construction Interview (CCI) to elicit small stories (micronarratives) from clients that reveal how they have constructed their

“self, identity, and career” (Savickas, 2013a, p. 168). Telling stories and expressing one’s narrative reflects individual and social dynamics and can either constrain or expand the parameters through which an individual thinks (Yoon, 2016). Thus, during the CCI (and throughout the entire career counselling process), career counsellors should listen for, and work with the client to deconstruct discouraging and demoralizing ideas, beliefs, scripts, or incidents that often involve bias, oppression, and discrimination (Savickas, 2012, 2013a).

Gibson (2004) brought up an important point that there may be competing narratives regarding an individual’s story. However, he went on to state that rather than determining the “right” interpretation, it is more important to consider the lens through which the story is viewed. This is where the deconstruction process of career construction counselling can be useful. By bringing unjust cultural and societal messages to conscious light and deconstructing them, women have the opportunity to choose the way in which they view their micronarratives, and thus how they reconstruct their macro narrative. Additionally, the CCI utilized in career construction counselling provides a sound structure to elicit stories and reconstruct them into a larger macro narrative, and it allows for greater assurance that the client remains the expert and the interpreter of their life, not the counsellor (Savickas, 2015).

It is important to keep in mind that while storytelling can be transformative, it also can be harmful if it serves to perpetuate dominant beliefs, assumptions, values, and emotions (Yoon, 2016). Thus, it is critical for career counsellors to move beyond the single storyline of a stereotype as they work with clients. To help with this, one must conduct the deconstruction process with the utmost care in following feminist and multicultural counselling practices such as honoring differing values and worldviews; not pathologizing client experiences, perspectives, or feelings; and valuing the client’s characterization of optimal functioning.

Upon completing the interview, the career counsellor goes through the micronarratives elicited from the client to identify overarching themes by pulling together the client’s own words and stories while taking the utmost care not to interpret. By identifying these overarching themes, the career counsellor is able to reconstruct a subjective macro narrative, or life portrait, regarding the client’s identity (Savickas, 2012, 2013a) which “explains clients’ past, orients them to the present, and guides them into the future” (Savickas, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, the macro narrative highlights the client’s career themes and how one has used, or can use, work as a way to shift from “preoccupation” to “occupation” as a way to become more whole (Savickas, 2012, 2013a). Additionally, as Maree (2013) so eloquently stated, it can facilitate client movement from “pain-filled to triumph-filled themes” (p. 4) and towards social contribution. Upon sharing the life portrait with the client, the career counsellor is attentive to the client’s reactions and encourages further reflection and emotional engagement with the macro narrative as part of the coconstruction process (Savickas, 2012, 2013a). Together, the client and career counsellor modify the life portrait as appropriate and “craft a move in meaning with which to confront choices” (Savickas, 2012, p. 17). With this movement in meaning, action must ensue so that personal insights and intention translate into behaviors, which then can advance further self-creation and career constructing (Savickas, 2012, 2013a).

As suggested earlier, the reconstruction and coconstruction processes of career construction counselling can continue to involve deconstruction of limiting beliefs and oppressive messaging. The meaning making that can occur for the client through this reflexive process can lead to greater awareness of how stereotypes, oppression, and discrimination have affected life-career choices and circumstances. Clients can also begin to see how their methods of making meaning, coping, and surviving in oppressive circumstances can draw on their strengths to help them move forward into their future life design, hopefully with a broader and more hopeful perspective. Furthermore, this movement forward may include social contribution (Maree, 2013) in ways that include advocacy for social action and change, a goal of feminist counselling (Enns, 2004).

Career construction with Julia. Because Julia is a fictitious composite from a variety of clients, it would not be appropriate to fabricate her answers to the CCI. Thus, the authors have instead brought up points for readers to consider, especially concerning the deconstruction and coconstruction processes. For more thorough coverage of the questions in the CCI, and case samples, readers are referred to Maree (2014, 2016), Savickas (2013a, 2015), and Savickas and Lara (2016).

Tensions are likely to come up through Julia's early recollections and possibly her childhood role models. There may be themes indicating that Julia feels pulled between intersecting identities and conflicting values. What emotions come up for Julia as she describes her early recollections? How would others in her environment receive these emotions? What messages did she receive from others about her early childhood role models? Are there dynamic tensions between her role models? For example, she may have a role model that exhibits feminine qualities, but another role model that exhibits qualities more often attributed to men.

In considering Julia's favorite story as her script for moving forward, the career counsellor can pay attention to what that means to Julia based on her various identities and the potential barriers she will encounter. For example, Julia has already discussed issues surrounding motherhood, thus it may be useful to work with Julia to deconstruct the intensive motherhood ideology. This ideology requires the mother to be the central caregiver and devote copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources to her child (Hays, 1996). Additionally, Thompson and Dahling (2012) recommended exploration of experiences with resources and barriers that influence women's perceptions of the accessibility of various career options.

During the CCI, the feminist career counsellor is careful to attend to beliefs, feelings, and experiences that are possible indicators of oppression and when appropriate, explore those with the client. A strength of using narrative career counselling is that stressors individuals feel upon stepping outside of their cultural, familial, or societal expectations for a career can be identified and explored (Phipps, 2016). These tensions can provide fertile ground in raising new insights for Julia regarding social roles and systemic oppressive influences in her life. Ideally, she can see herself not as the problem, but instead as a strong woman who as coped with and survived oppressive circumstances. Julia can then use her story to reclaim her power and construct her life-career.

It is important to note that the feminist career counsellor must take care during this process not to impose any values onto Julia or try to be the expert. Instead, the career counsellor works to create space that acknowledges Julia as the expert and author of her own story. Taking back the power of their own identities can assist women in not feeling forced to adapt their identities to match that of societal norms regarding what a woman “should” be (Yakushko et al., 2009).

Conclusion

Utilizing career construction counselling through a feminist counselling lens can assist career counsellors in intentionally attending to personal, cultural, contextual, historical, and socio-political forces at work in women’s lives. Feminist career counsellors can listen for messages regarding stereotypes, bias, discrimination, and oppression that impose barriers to individuals’ journeys towards who they are becoming. This can be especially useful in career counselling women to raise their consciousness regarding how the personal is political and that some of their presenting issues may be coping mechanisms for dealing with oppression. In raising their critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), these women may reclaim their power, and in doing so, they can choose to actively master that which they have passively suffered.

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