

Investigation on the career construction theory



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Robert Sharf (2010) states that a “ career is a construction that an individual makes...the construction of one’s career changes throughout life and is constantly developing” (p. 327). Based on this quote, one can infer that an individual makes a career rather than a career creating an individual. The purpose of this paper is to explore the three dimensions of Mark Savickas career construction theory and how it plays a role in counseling an individual.

Savickas career construction theory is a unique approach to career development as it is a meta-theory, “ a comprehensive theory derived from existing theories” (Sharf, 2010, p. 327). Savickas incorporated ideas from Holland, Super, and other theorists to come up with this comprehensive theory that uses a narrative approach to both assess a client and shape the counseling sessions (Sharf, 2010, p. 316). Savickas career construction theory is also influenced by Alfred Adler’s psychotherapeutic theory.

Encompassing how the world of careers is accomplished through social constructionism and personal constructivism, career construction theory “ asserts that we construct representations of reality, but we do not construct reality itself” (Brown & Lent, 2005, p. 43). Construction theorists believe that individuals make choices based on their goals and the development of a career comes from an individual adapting to his or her environment (Brown & Lent, 2005, p. 43). Savickas focuses on adaptation to the environment rather than maturity or the life stages that an individual progresses through (Sharf, 2010, p. 327). Individuals make a career by attributing meaning to their occupational experience as well as to their vocational behavior (Brown & Lent, 2005, p. 43).

Counselors who use this approach look for three basic components in a client's story: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes (Brown & Lent, 2005, pg. 43). The sections that follow will elaborate on each of the components mentioned above.

In vocational personality, career construction theory aims "to improve practice in augmenting, not replacing, person-environment fit theories that match people to occupations" (Brown & Lent, 2005, p. 43). Like John Holland, Savickas uses the personality theory three letter code, but instead of comparing this three letter code with other individuals, Savickas uses it to understand a client's story from the both perspective of the client and counselor (Sharf, 2010, p. 327).

From a career construction theorist's point of view, Holland's realistic component includes individuals who describe using physical or mechanical skills and the use of tools and machines in hobbies or work related situations (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). The investigative type describes interests in solving complex science problems, enjoys being challenged intellectually, and solving puzzles (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). An artistic type would talk about activities involving art, cooking, music, and painting. A client with this type of personality shows their enthusiasm in creating these projects (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). Social types tend to discuss the idea of helping or teaching others and they enjoy resolving idealistic or complex problems (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). The enterprising type will reveal that having money is an important aspect in their life (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). And lastly, the conventional type may discuss office work, working with numbers, and demonstrate organizational and planning skills (Sharf, 2010, p. 328). While these six

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personality types are very similar to Holland's personality types, Savickas uses it to see how individuals have created their own careers and how they have constructed themselves (Sharf, 2010, p. 328).

The next component of the career construction theory is career adaptability. Career adaptability refers to the "attitude, competencies, and behaviors that individuals use in fitting themselves to work that suits them" (Brown & Lent, 2005, p. 45). It can also refer to dealing with personal issues or society as a whole. In developmental tasks of career adaptability, Savickas uses Donald Super's life stages, which include growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement (Sharf, 2010, p. 329).

The growth stage begins before a person reaches the age of 15 and consists of individuals dealing with issues regarding school, family, and friends (Sharf, 2010, p. 329). In the exploration stage, which happens between the ages of 15 to 25 years old, individuals start to reflect on possible career options. Their story entails information about their first job and how well they got along with supervisors and co-workers (Sharf, 2010, p. 329). Between the ages of 25 to 45 years old, the establishment stage occurs. A client who is in this stage will talk about information regarding the advancement of his or her career, feelings about the stability of the job and the future of the job will show (Sharf, 2010, p. 329). The management stage occurs between the ages of 45 to 65 years, and happens when individuals up keep their skills to perform their job (Sharf, 2010, p. 329). And lastly, in the disengagement stage, individuals pull away from their jobs due to physical or health limitations (Sharf, 2010, p. 330). Individuals look forward to their retirement from a career. This can happen anywhere before or after the age of 65.

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Again, while all of these stages are very similar Super's stages, from a career construction perspective, the story that the client share is more important than comparing these stages with other individuals.

The last factor of the career construction theory deals with life themes. Savickas used " life stories as the crucial threads of continuity that made meaningful the elements of vocational personality and adaptability" (McIlveen & Patton, 2007, p. 227). Life themes help a counselor get more information about the individual and produce themes that have occurred within a person's lifetime (Sharf, 2010, p. 332). It also assists counselors in understanding why the individual made a certain career choice and helps clarify the meaning behind those choices (McIlveen & Patton, 2007, p. 227). To sum this up, in McIlveen and Patton (2007), Savickas states that career stories " tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow" (p. 227). This quote demonstrates how a person's life story can really impact their past, present, and future.

The main focus of the career construction theory is for counselor's to focus on the stories that their clients share with them. These theorists also believe that " the person's real self comes out during the narration of the stories" (Sharf, 2010, p. 336). Counselors who practice this theory use a Career Style Interview, where a list of questions is provided that the counselor asks the client (Sharf, 2010, p. 333). This process provides the counselor with an opportunity to assess the lifestyle of the client and look for themes that keep reoccurring (Sharf, 2010, p. 333).

During a counseling session, counselors seek “ to write and rewrite a career story that relates vocational self-concepts to work role” (Savickas, 2002, p. 192). These narratives should show that a client’s occupation is used to complete their self identity (Savickas, 2002, p. 192). Overall, the goal is to make the client happy in whatever environment that suites their narrative story.