

MacIlveen, Peter and Patton, Wendy A. (2007) Dialogical Self: Author and Narrator of Career Life Themes. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 7(2):pp. 67-80.

Copyright 2007 Springer (Kluwer)

Accessed from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au>

RUNNING HEAD: DIALOGICAL SELF

Dialogical Self: Author and Narrator of Career Life Themes

Peter McIlveen and Wendy Patton

Queensland University of Technology

Corresponding Author:

Peter McIlveen

Student Services

University of Southern Queensland

Toowoomba 4350

AUSTRALIA

+61 7 46312375

+61 7 46312880 (fax)

mcilveen@usq.edu.au

Abstract

This conceptual paper introduces the Theory of Dialogical Self to the career development literature. The life themes component of the Theory of Career Construction is the focus of application for dialogical self. It is proposed that the notion of dialogical self may contribute to understanding how individuals construct the career-related life themes. Dialogical self is thus presented as a promising theoretical construct to augment the explanatory capacity of the Theory of Career Construction and the constructivist, narrative approach to career theory in general. Implications for career counselling are presented.

Key words: dialogical self; subjective career; career construction; life themes.

Dialogical Self: Author and Narrator of Career Life Themes

The Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2002, 2005) and its earlier formulation (Savickas, 2001) comprehensively covers process and content aspects of career (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and is lauded as being nearest to a single integrated theoretical framework for career (Inkson, 2007). Within the Theory of Career Construction, the term *career* signifies reflection upon an individual's vocational activity; that is, reflection upon the *objective career*, such as occupations, tasks, and duties. The reflective process can also focus upon the meaning ascribed to career events; that is, the *subjective career*. Savickas (2005) posited three components of the theory: *Vocational personality*, *career adaptability*, and *life themes*. In combination, the three components provide a comprehensive theory of career which has considerable potential to subsume a range of theories emanating from different paradigms. Given its broad theoretical capacity and relevance to counselling practice, the Theory of Career Construction is addressed in this paper. The notion of life themes is focused upon specifically, with the aim of further developing its theoretical composition.

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

The Theory of Career Construction purports that individuals generate their own life themes of career. It does not, however, in its current formulation, offer a psychological explanation for how individuals enact a process of self-constructive storying. Savickas

(2001) posited *selection*, *optimisation*, and *compensation* as psychological mechanisms of career adaptability; however, these mechanisms do not explain how an individual creates a story. Although the theory's propositions include the statement that "career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversations" (Savickas, 2005, p. 46), explication of this theoretical tenet is required to further advance the capacity of the life themes component of the theory. This objective could be achieved by positing a psychological construct to explain how conversations can generate meaningful themes through dialogue with others and with oneself.

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

Dialogical Self

The Theory of Dialogical Self has its roots in contextualist and constructionist psychology and has been extensively articulated by Hubert Hermans (e.g., 1996, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2006), along with others (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993), particularly in the counselling and psychotherapy literature (e.g., Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004). The theory has also been explicated by others in special issues of scholarly journals; take for example *Theory and Psychology* (2002, issue 2), the *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* (2003, issue 2), and *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* (2006, issue 1). Notwithstanding the unpublished doctoral dissertation by Van de Loo (1992, cited in Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995) and the presence of the theory of dialogical self in other fields, it has not been fully articulated into the career development literature. This paper contributes to its articulation by converging

dialogical self and the notion of life themes. For the sake of being succinct, only a précis of the theory of dialogical self is presented in this paper. Readers are advised to consult the not inconsiderable works of Hermans and his colleagues.

The Internet: An Explanatory Metaphor

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

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

I Authors of Me Actors

Dialogical self was extended from one of psychology's early theories of self. The juxtaposition of *I* and *Me* was distinguished by William James (1890/1952). He described the *Me*, as the empirical self, or known-self, that was subdivided into material, social, and spiritual selves. The subdivision of *Me* underpinned the assertion that an individual could

take many variations of *Me* in the world. The *I*, on the other hand, is a continuous mental process which observes and coheres the various manifestations of *Me*. James' notion of self is fundamental to the theory of dialogical self. However the theory extends James' idea of a single author, *I*, and includes the notion of an *I* that has the potential for multiplicity.

Multiple Voices

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

The self becomes *dialogical* with the exchange, or communication, with the individual's phenomenal world (cf. Buber, 1958). Thus, the dialogical self does not involve a hierarchical structure of personality, as traditionally conceived of, but rather a dynamic flux of interacting voices.

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

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

Individuals also engage in dialogue with the *collective voices* of groups within their social and cultural context (Hermans, 2001b, 2002b, 2003). This dialogue may be real and audible; however, it also occurs within the individual as imagined dialogue with others. Collective voices also have the capacity to constrain the meanings that may be derived from dialogue because of the rules of a particular shared discourse. There is a reflexive interchange between individual and collective voices; they inherently affect one another. “The voice on the higher, superordinate level brings together and organises a specific combination of voices at the lower, subordinate level. At the same time, the latter level gives a personal touch to the former level” (Hermans, 2002a, p. 149).

Multiple I-positions

Dostoevsky’s characters were inter-related and were to be conceived of as being in a spatial relationship; not uncoupled, but rather intrinsically juxtaposed or contradictory, and not independent of one another (Hermans, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). This *spatialisation* of voices is a crucial correlate to the dialogical self and relates to the embodied and spatial self. From the analogy of dialogical self being akin to a polyphonous novel, it extends that an individual is made up of many characters, each independent of one another; yet inextricably together. They are invented by one multifarious self, in one body, authored under the same

hand; a single person who brought each position into voice, and thence into their lived reality.

How, then, does the dialogical self become so multifaceted?

As with the Dostoevsky novel, *I* takes multiple authorial positions in space *and* time and can observe a constructed *Me* moving in an imaginal or real landscape.

As in a landscape, the “I” has the possibility to move from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The “I” is able to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The different voices relate to one another as interacting characters in a story, who from their respective “I” positions exchange information about their respective “me(s)” and their worlds, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self (Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993, pp. 215-216).

Dialogical self is thus decentred; that is, there is not one central, autonomous self. In this way the individual consists of the *I* taking multiple perspectives in different temporal and spatial positions, giving voice to themselves and to one another.

Hermans (2002b, p. 71) defined the characteristics of *I-positions*, which are the many spatial and temporal positions that may be taken up by *I*. They may take on features of permanence (e.g., a relationship with a lifelong friend) or be transient (e.g., a stranger on a bus with whom one strikes up a conversation). Positions may attract institutionalised support (e.g., valorised social roles such as spouse or a parent), or they may attract social derision (e.g., deviant groups). *I-positions* may vary in their effect upon one another; that is, there is no assumption of equivalent reciprocity amongst them. *I-positions* may be imaginary (e.g., a childhood superhero character). The frequency with which *I-positions* are active within the self may vary. *I-positions* may be positive or negative, enjoyable or threatening. The degree of otherness may vary such that two positions may differ only slightly whereas others may be at odds with one another (e.g., being a worksite manager whilst being surreptitiously

supportive of a union strike). Furthermore, some *I-positions* are not within the immediate awareness of the individual (Hermans, 2003).

I-positions are unlike traits, which are assumed to be stable across situations and time, do not allow for self-reflection and self-evaluation, are inherently orthogonal, and are unable to dynamically conflict and reconcile with one another (Hermans, 2001b). Individuals may, however, construct an *I-position* of a trait and author from that position. Hermans suggested that, in doing so, traits are “transformed from characterisations to characters” (p. 332).

Change of the Dialogical Self

The dialogical self is not static and is inherently transformed by the exchanges amongst *I-positions* or with other individuals—real or imagined (Hermans, Rijks, & Kempen, 1993). The dialogical self has the capacity to be innovative, that is, to change through positioning and re-positioning (Hermans, 2002b; Hermans & Kempen, 1993). It may also experience its own form of personal conservatism through which multiple voices and positions are avoided (Hermans, 2003).

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

The entire system alters each time a new *I-position* is taken. Hermans (2003) later refined this process and argued that there were three ways in which the dialogical self can innovate itself: Firstly, a new position may be introduced into the system; secondly, background or latent positions may move to the foreground and become salient; and finally, two or more positions cooperate to form a new subsystem—a coalition (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2004). As the *I* moves from one position to another in its imaginal space it creates moments of self-negotiation, self-contradiction, and self-integration.

Career Construction: Dialogical Self at Work

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

Micro-theme

Savickas (2005) suggested that life themes make meaningful sense of vocational personality and adaptability characteristics. At the simplest level, consistent patterns of thinking, behaving, and feeling (e.g., occupational traits and interests) are meaningfully apprehended by the individual. For example, a person may take an *I-position* of a Realistic

type (apropos of Holland, 1985). In taking an *I-position* and saying to oneself and the world through dialogical relations: “I am an ABC type and XYZ occupation would suit me best”, the client hears his or her own voice and, in doing so, reifies his or her type through the very act of speaking as if it were true. This simplistic formulation introduces the nexus of vocational personality and life themes within Theory of Career Construction. The storying by dialogical self goes to another level of complexity however.

Meso-theme

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

Exo-theme

A rich life theme is produced by a dialogical self that moves between *I-positions* and reflexively communicates within itself using the discourses of its world, particularly the

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

Macro-theme

Whilst the Theory of Career Construction proposes that society and its institutions shape individuals' roles, it does not specifically account for the discursive limits of an individual, whereas dialogical self—itself a discursive construct—provides a theoretical solution to explaining how an individual cannot become, in a career sense, whatever they desire. Dialogical self is inherent to the discursive environment in which an individual exists. An *I-position* authors stories only in the language and symbols it apprehends and by which it communicates and exchanges with its inner and outer world. An individual who has been richly exposed to the world of work and can negotiate the multiple discourses of that world, will likely be able to generate several *I-positions* which can generate several alternative stories for his or her career. Unfortunately those individuals whose exposure to the world-of-

work has been attenuated by broader influences (e.g., social class), constrained by collective voices (e.g., gender), or inadvertently manipulated by pernicious societal and professional discourses (McIlveen & Patton, 2006), may be unable to take a similar array of *I-positions*, and their career aspirations would be thus far limited. Continuing from the previous example, the person may say: “I am practical and hands-on, but I am also inquisitive. My wife wants to live in the country, but I see myself as a city person. What chance would I have in the city anyway? There are no jobs for country people like me”.

Thematic Dynamics

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

The Theory of Career Construction focuses on past events and memories for the generation of life themes. In this developmental frame of career construction (Savickas, 2002), dialogical self constructs career and life themes across past, present, and future. Multiple *I-positions* can create histories of past events and reformulate the stories in the present and prospectively for the future. Dialogical self creates the plot, subplots, characters, and the text of life themes and associated career stories. Career stories are thickened and

revised as the meanings constructed through ongoing dialogical transactions between *I-positions* reflexively transpire into a lived reality.

Implications for Career Counselling

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

The theory of dialogical self is not merely a theory of personality; it is also a theory for counselling. The telling of one's story through counselling is germane to the dialogical self. Hermans (2001a, p. 58) stated that "clients seem to tell counsellors the stories that they themselves need to hear because, from all their available stories, they narrate those stories that support current goals and inspire action". A person's autobiographical sense of identity is a social construction brought into existence and modified through dialogue (Bruner, 1990; Pasupathi, 2001). In this vein, life themes are not simply a collection of historical facts reiterated in counselling. The notion of dialogical exchange is informative for counselling because it brings the conversations between a client and counsellor into focus; for it is through these conversations that a client and counsellor can co-construct life themes and together story the person whom the client was, is, and aspires to be.

Constructivist, narrative career counselling can be viewed as the process of facilitating dialogue amongst *I-positions* toward the co-construction of reformulated or new career stories. Generating dialogue amongst *I-positions* can be better understood by way of example. The Personal Position Repertoire (Hermans, 2001b) is a method of assessment for facilitating dialogical exchange in accordance with the theory of dialogical self. The client is given a list of possible internal personal or social *I-positions* (e.g., I as man, I as spouse) and possible external positions (e.g., my friend, my house). Having written meaningful valuations regarding each internal and external position, they then are opposed to one another across an x and y axis to form a matrix. The client and counsellor select particular *I-positions* or intersections of *I-positions* for discussion, comparison, contrast, and interpretation. Hence, a client may explore dialogical relations amongst the *I-positions*. This process allows for the development of a rich and diverse story within counselling.

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

positions, as internal and internal career influences, and from different *I-positions* across time, as a younger person conversing with the current person, and from the real conversations between counsellor and client.

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

Career counselling can also entail the deconstruction of existing delimiting discursive practices of the dialogical self in context. Albeit beyond the limits of this paper to elucidate, the theory of dialogical self stands as a discursive mechanism which explains how that complex relationship would operate. The nexus of the discursive worlds and systems of career influences of the client and counsellor (Patton & McMahon, 2006) bring enhanced focus to the potential emancipation roles and responsibilities of the career counsellor. The obverse also holds true, in that the counsellor’s personal influences and engagement with professional discursive practices may limit the client’s development (McIlveen & Patton,

2006). From this view, the counsellor must ensure that the counselling process generates sufficient movement between *I-positions* and dialogical exchange so as to ensure a rich and diverse career story, as opposed to a limited story founded upon constrained dialogue. This may involve the introduction to the client of new discourses that are present in the world-of-work or the generation of new *I-positions* that open up alternatives in the dialogical exchanges inherent to career counselling.

Conclusion

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

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

The Theory of Career Construction purports that an individual’s career story and life themes are the crucial nodes of connection between the elements of vocational personality and adaptability. Hence, as suggested by Patton and McMahon (2006), career development

occurs with the individual's construction of meaning around the multiple career influences which are inherent to life. Dialogical self, with its multiple *I-positions* and voices, has the capacity to author and narrate diverse life stories. Thus, it is of theoretical relevance to the construction and co-construction of life themes and their generation through conversations.

Within the career development literature, the alignment of dialogical self with the life themes component of the Theory of Career Construction, and other constructivist approaches, offers promising avenues of exploration for practice and theory. Applying the notion of dialogical self to counselling practices may facilitate the development of new narrative counselling procedures (e.g., My Career Chapter). To extend the proposed connection between the notion of life themes and dialogical self, it could be fruitful to investigate its application to the narrative counselling approaches with theories that could be subsumed by the theory of life themes (e.g., Cochran, 1997). To explore the potential for theoretical convergence (cf. Savickas & Lent, 1994) amongst other constructivist theories of career which posit psychological mechanisms of narrative construction (e.g., *story* in Patton & McMahon, 2006; *intentional action* in Young & Valach, 2004), it may be useful to discover junctures at which dialogical self and the theories converge, and then consider how, in combination, they add to our understanding of career.

References

- Bakhtin, M. (1973). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (R. W. Rotsel, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis.
- Barresi, J. (2002). From 'the thought is the thinker' to 'the voice is the speaker'. William James and the dialogical self. *Theory & Psychology, 12*(2), 237-250.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*, 513-531.
- Brott, P. (2001). The storied approach: A postmodern perspective for career counseling. *The Career Development Quarterly, 49*, 304-313.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and THOU* (R. G. Smith, Trans. 2nd ed.). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Campbell, C., & Ungar, M. (2004). Constructing a life that works: Part 2, an approach to practice. *The Career Development Quarterly, 53*, 28-40.
- Chen, C. P. (2004). Positive compromise: A new perspective for career psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 13*(2), 17-28.
- Cochran, L. (1997). *Career counseling: A narrative approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gergen, K. J. (2001). Psychological science in a postmodern context. *American Psychologist, 56*(10), 803-813.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (1996). Voicing the self: From information processing to dialogical interchange. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*(1), 31-50.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001a). Conceptions of self and identity: Toward a dialogical view. *International Journal of Education and Religion, 11*(1), 43-62.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001b). The construction of a personal position repertoire: Method and practice. *Culture & Psychology, 7*(3), 323-365.

- Hermans, H. J. M. (2002a). The dialogical self as a society of mind: Introduction. *Theory & Psychology, 12*(2), 147-160.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2002b). The dialogical self: One person, different stories. In Y. Kashima, M. Foddy & M. Platow (Eds.), *Self and identity: Personal, social, and symbolic* (pp. 71-99). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2003). The construction and reconstruction of a dialogical self. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 16*, 89-130.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2006). Moving through three paradigms, yet remaining the same thinker. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 19*(1), 5-25.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Dimaggio, G. (Eds.). (2004). *The dialogical self in psychotherapy*. Hove: Brunner-Routledge.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Hermans-Jansen, E. (2004). The dialogical construction of coalitions in a personal position repertoire. In H. J. M. Hermans & G. Dimaggio (Eds.), *The dialogical self in psychotherapy* (pp. 124-137). Hove: Brunner-Routledge.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1993). *The dialogical self: Meaning as movement*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M., Kempen, H. J. G., & van Loon, R., J P. (1992). The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism. *American Psychologist, 47*(1), 23-33.
- Hermans, H. J. M., Rijks, T. I., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1993). Imaginal dialogues in the self: Theory and method. *Journal of Personality, 61*(2), 207-236.
- Holland, J. L. (1985). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Inkson, K. (2007). *Understanding careers: The metaphors of working lives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- James, W. (1890/1952). *The principles of psychology*. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

- Lysaker, P. H., & Lysaker, J. T. (2002). Narrative structure in psychosis: Schizophrenia and disruptions in the dialogical self. *Theory & Psychology, 12*(3), 207-220.
- McAdams, D. P. (2006). The problem of narrative coherence. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 19*(2), 109-125.
- McIlveen, P. (2006). *My Career Chapter: A Dialogical Autobiography*. Unpublished manuscript.
- McIlveen, P., Ford, T., & Dun, K. (2005). A narrative sentence-completion process for systems career assessment. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 14*(3), 30-39.
- McIlveen, P., McGregor-Bayne, H., Alcock, A., & Hjertum, E. (2003). Evaluation of a semi-structured career assessment interview derived from systems theory framework. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 12*, 33-41.
- McIlveen, P., & Patton, W. (2006). A critical reflection on career development. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*, 15-27.
- McMahon, M. (2006). Working with storytellers: A metaphor for career counselling. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches* (pp. 16-29). London: Routledge.
- McMahon, M., Patton, W., & Watson, M. (2005). *My System of Career Influences*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Pasupathi, M. (2001). The social construction of the personal past and its implications for adult development. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*(5), 651-672.
- Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Savickas, M. (2001). Toward a comprehensive theory of career development: Dispositions, concerns, and narratives. In F. T. L. Leong & A. Barak (Eds.), *Contemporary models*

in vocational psychology: A volume in honor of Samuel H. Osipow. (pp. 295-320).

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Savickas, M. (2002). Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D. A. Brown (Ed.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 149-205). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Savickas, M. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42-70). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Savickas, M., & Lent, R. W. (Eds.). (1994). *Convergence in career development theories*. Palo Alto: CPP Books.

Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2005). Qualitative relational career assessment: A constructivist paradigm. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 13(4), 381-394.

Van de Loo, R. (1992). *Clarification of career perspective: Development and application of a program for career orientation on the basis of the self-confrontation method*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nijmegen, Assen.

Young, R. A., & Valach, L. (2004). The construction of career through goal-directed action. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64, 499-514.