

Chapter 12

Career Counseling as a Science, a Skill, and an Art: Drawing on the Inspiring Career-Life Story of Dolly Parton to Demonstrate How Theory Building in Career Construction Counseling is Premised on Practice



*Find out who you are and do it on purpose
The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you got to put up with
the rain
Storms make trees take deeper roots (Dolly Parton)*

*We learned more from a three-minute record ... than we ever
learned in school (Bruce Springsteen)*

Abstract This chapter draws on the inspiring life story of the amazing Dolly Parton to demonstrate the remarkable overlap between multiple facets of Mark Savickas' counseling for self- and career construction theory and how this theory is practically and "naturally" enacted in numerous real-life contexts. First, a brief background to Dolly Parton's life is presented, and the overlap between her career-life story and the theory of career construction counseling is outlined. A truncated biography of Dolly Parton follows, after which the focus shifts to an elaboration of how she developed herself as a career project (Cochran, 1992). The outcomes of a "virtual" self- and career construction counseling-based interview conducted with her (based on information gathered from numerous publications and interviews) are used to uncover her key life themes. This interview is subsequently analyzed, and mission and vision statements are proposed for her. Next, the chapter discusses how Dolly Parton enacted her mission and vision and influenced the lives of countless other people positively (and continues to do so). More particularly, she provided and continues to provide a holding environment for millions of people. I explain how self- and career construction principles are realized in Dolly Parton's career-life story before the chapter is concluded.

12.1 Orientation

Many years ago as an ardent fan of Dolly Parton's music, I began incorporating some of her songs and comments and life story into my lectures and presentations,

in South Africa and abroad. The “message” that I hope to convey through this book is that career counseling, too, can be excitement-filled, creative, inspirational, and life-changing. Dolly Parton’s two honorary doctorates for her creative and humanitarian contributions, as well as the UT’s introduction of an honors course on her work, shows that her work is valued and respected as much by the scholarly community as it is by the public in general. The chapter draws on her inspiring career-life story to demonstrate how counseling for self- and career construction counseling theory is practically and “naturally” enacted in numerous real-life contexts. Watching her remarkable career unfold over the past four decades, I have been particularly interested in observing the overlap between the theory and practice of self- and career construction counseling and the evolution of Dolly Parton’s life story (Hinckley, 2017). The way in which she has succeeded in actively mastering what she had passively suffered (Savickas, 2001), for instance, has been well documented by numerous authors. Her inspiring “story” has also been captured in musical form especially but also in many books, movies, and articles of various kinds. Below, I elaborate further on this topic.

12.2 Dolly Parton’s Timeless Conversation with Music

Dolly Parton entered into a remarkable conversation with music at a very early age, and key facets of her career-life story have been captured in her timeless songs. In her own words: “Songs ... They’re just stories put to music (Netflix, 2019).” The deeply moving autobiographical song *Coat of many colors* (Globazik Media, 2018), her own favorite, signature song from among the roughly 3000 songs she has written, is of particular interest from the perspective of this book, and the following two lines from the song in particular have become embedded in the hearts and minds of many millions of people across the world:

- a. “One is only poor if [one] choose[s] to be”, and
- b. “Although we had no money, I was rich as I could be in my coat of many colors that my mama made for me.” (Photograph 12.1)

The embedded messages conveyed by these lines lie at the heart of this book, and the approach developed by Savickas and advocated here provides a powerful strategy to realize it. The messages also provide a good place to talk about resilience and thriving in the face of discrimination. Two issues should resonate with all career counselors: First, Dolly Parton had an excellent “audience” in her mother who reminded her constantly about how special she was (career counselors often represent the supportive audience their clients need). Second, she chose not to accept the negative stories of others about her that she was “poor”. Instead, she defined “poorness” not in terms of money but rather in terms of lack of character (H. Sensoy-Bridgick, personal communication, October 20, 2019).

To set the scene for the rest of the chapter, I begin by reporting briefly on Dolly Parton’s biography.

Photograph 12.1 *Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors* coat displayed in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee. *Source* Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_Many_Colors_coat.jpg



12.3 Background to Dolly Parton's Life: Brief Biography

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on 19 January 1946 in a one-room cottage on the banks of the Little Pigeon River in the small town of Pittman Center, Sevier County (in the Great Smoky Mountains, East Tennessee) (Parton, 2010; Schmidt, 2017). The family lived a simple life, slept on straw beds, and had no electricity, gas, or running water. Her father (Robert Lee) was a sharecropper while her mother (Avie Lee) was a housewife. The family consisted of 12 children (six boys and six girls), six of whom became professional musicians. A 13th member of the family died shortly after birth. His passing was traumatic for Dolly, the more so because, according to the tradition in that part of the world at the time, she had the job of looking after him. As a result, many of her current social outreach projects are aimed at helping children in need. Her own family barely made a living, with the children growing up in extreme poverty.

Dolly's entire life has been closely interwoven with music activities. She wrote her first song (*Little tiny Tasseltop*, a song about a little doll her father had made for

her, while her mother had made the doll a dress) at the age of five and went on to write more than 3000 songs. She began to play the guitar at the age of seven, and her first record (*Puppy love*) was released when she was 13 years old. She always wanted to be a singer and took a bus to Nashville (“Music city”) immediately after she had graduated from high school. The rest is indeed “history”.

12.4 Overview of Some of Dolly Parton’s Milestone Achievements

A global icon and role model, Dolly Parton is the most celebrated singer-songwriter in the history of country music. A gifted singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, record producer, philanthropist, actress, and businesswoman, she has received global recognition for her innovative contributions to the world of music over many decades, coupled with her humanitarian projects. Her philanthropic work includes the promotion of children’s reading and education. In 1988, she founded the Dollywood Foundation to inspire children in her home county to achieve educational success. The foundation finances Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, a book-gifting and -distribution program that distributes books across the world. To date, the program has distributed 130 million books to pre-school aged children for free. Children receive a free book for five years (every month from the day they are born until they reach kindergarten). The first book they receive is *The little engine that could* (Piper, 2001), and *Look out Kindergarten, here I come!* (Carlson, 2004) is the last. Sandwiched between these two books, children receive books that are chosen by a panel of literary experts. All books relate to the themes of inspiration and imagination (CNN Library, 2019; Dembling, 2011; Schmidt, 2017).

Dolly Parton has received 47 Grammy Award nominations and has also been nominated for three Academy Awards as well as two Emmys and a Tony Award. She has sold over 160 million albums globally (*News Sentinel Staff*, 2009) and has been awarded two honorary doctorates. The first was awarded by Carson-Newman College for her commitment to education in Appalachia. The second was awarded by the University of Tennessee (UT), which bestowed only the second honorary doctorate in “Humane and musical letters” ever to Dolly Parton in 2009. The Chancellor of UT (Jimmy Cheek) explained that she received the degree “because of her career not just as a musician and entertainer, but for her role as a cultural ambassador, philanthropist and lifelong advocate for education” (*News Sentinel Staff*, 2009, p. 1). Dolly’s active mastery over the things she encountered as a child resulted in her achieving success as well as in her giving back to others. During her acceptance speech, she commented that education and the arts were hugely important to her and that the degree was something that “makes me and would have made my parents very proud” (*News Sentinel Staff*, 2009, p. 1).

This section of the chapter on Dolly Parton would be incomplete without reference to Dollywood, the theme park conceptualized and seen through to completion

by Dolly (see my earlier comments in this regard). When, in 1986, her lawyers recommended that she drop the idea of Dollywood, she again refused and, instead, fired them. Today, Dollywood is the largest single entertainment park in the USA, employing many thousands of people (approximately 3000 people are on its payroll, making Dollywood the single largest employer in the area).

Below, I report on the outcomes of a “virtual” or simulated self- and career construction counseling interview (based on information obtained from numerous publications and actual interviews given by her) with Dolly Parton to shed more light on just how she had succeeded in developing herself as a life and career project (Cochran, 1992). This enabled her to appreciate the dynamic forces that shaped and continue to shape her central self—a process that ends in and embodies self-construction that has enabled her to negotiate numerous transitions throughout her life. In other words, a process that illustrates the advancement of her sense of self and her career and life identity or sense of who she really is (Guichard, 2008a, 2008b). This interview will also enable us to uncover Dolly's key life themes.

12.5 Outcomes of a “Virtual” Self- and Career Construction Counseling-Based Interview with Dolly Parton: Uncovering her Key Life Themes

Dolly Parton's responses to a number of career-story questions/statements appear below. **(It should be emphasized, though, that these responses are based purely on information gathered from numerous publications and actual interviews given by her.)**

1. Her greatest strengths:

Much has been written about Dolly Parton's greatest strengths, and it is not possible to list all of them here. However, the following strengths (Crowder, 2014; Parton, 2016) are probably representative of her specific uniqueness.

- a. She is extremely loyal—to her family, her home state, her followers, and her country. After having expressed her support for the LGBT(QIA) community, for instance, she received threats from various people but refused to be bullied into withdrawing her support.
- b. She is splendidly unique. A person who never allows stale, worn-out rules to limit her self- and career construction. Instead, she is renowned for her own signature look, style of singing, acting, dressing, working, re-inventing herself, and reaching out to others.
- c. She is resilient, readily acknowledges her own limitations and mistakes, which confirms the strength and intactness of her sense of self (her identity; who she really is). It shows that, beneath the wigs, the make-up, and the self-deprecating comments, she is an emotionally stable human being who has nothing to prove by pretending to be someone she is not, nor someone who never makes mistakes.

- d. Once she is motivated to do something, she will do everything she can to actualize that dream. In her own words, “24/7, 365, I was going to make a success of my life” (Parton, 2011, n.p.). She is a living example of a person who is not afraid to pursue her dreams tirelessly.
 - e. She does not allow herself to be defined by, for instance, other people, the extreme poverty she grew up in, and the hurt and rejection she suffered early in life. Instead, she displays a remarkable and inspiring capacity to turn hurt into hope evidenced by, for instance, the manner in which she dealt with the rejection and humiliation she suffered when she was mocked by her classmates when she wore her coat of many colors to school.
 - f. She stands up for what she believes in.
 - g. She is sincere, compassionate, and really cares about people. Her mother describes her as a genuinely caring person who is sensitive to the needs of other people and finds it hard to see others suffer.
 - h. She is action-orientated and a living example of a person who does things instead of merely talking about what must or can be done. Examples of her industry are the large number of songs she had composed (generally regarded as 3000+) (Sawyers, 2019), the books she has written, her participation in several movies, her book distribution project, and the theme park she conceptualized and brought to fruition (Barnes, 2019).
 - i. She is not swayed by the opinions of others but, rather, draws on her own life story for advice, a theme that pervades her life story. A few examples can illustrate this: When she decided to follow a career as a solo artist, she was sued by her singing partner, Porter Wagoner. However, she did not give in. Her decision was vindicated in the years after the split when she became globally renowned and contributed hugely to the popularity of country music (Parton, 2016).
2. Her areas for development:
She could probably sleep and rest more.
 3. What she values most.
Helping others in need, using her talents to entertain and bring happiness to others, using her wealth to make a difference in the lives of others, promoting education and the arts, and writing and singing songs that people can go to in their greatest need. In addition, she says: “I’ve always felt like my music was more my ministry than a job” (Mitas, 2020, p. 2).
 4. She admired the following person when she was young:
“The local town ‘tramp’: I thought she was the most beautiful person I’d ever seen when we were little kids.” She added that that woman was “the lady that I actually patterned myself after because she left an impression” (Sprankles & Brolley, 2019, n.p.). It wasn’t until much later, Dolly admitted, that she learned that the woman was actually a local prostitute. She admired the woman for the fact that her style was unique, and to this day she continues to admire her because of her unique style. Dolly is very clear on the matter: She never judged the woman,

nor does she judge anyone else. All that mattered to her then and matters to her today is that the woman was unique, different, and “stylish”. Dolly Parton herself is arguably one of the most unique women in show business; a woman with her very own style. (This example also illustrates the principle that the important thing about people’s role models is what it is about the role models that people take from them.)

5. What others say about her:

“She is extremely sensitive. She has a gift to see and identify with the hurt and pain of others. She cares deeply about others and is distressed to see any one being sad or hurt. A gifted songwriter, she started composing songs before she could write them down. Her music has always been her way to express herself (Parton, 2016, n.p). She is as kind and nice as she is in person (if not more) as she is on stage.”

6. Six of her favorite mottos or quotations (BrainyQuote, n.d, n.p.):

“One is only poor, only if one chooses to be.”

“Find out who you are and do it on purpose.”

“Dream more, learn more, care more, and be more.”

“If you see someone without a smile, give them yours.”

“If you don’t like the road you’re walking on, start paving another one.”

“We cannot direct the wind but we can adjust the sails.”

7. Her favorite book or movie or book turned into a movie:

Here, Dolly repeatedly cites two books. The first is *Coat of Many Colors* (Dolly Parton, in Bonaguro, 2018, p. 3), the main theme of which is that one is poor only if one chooses to be poor. And how vividly does she not actualize this theoretical principle in her own life!

Her other favorite book is *The Little Engine That Could* because “[i]t shows children that you can do it if you think you can ... that’s my philosophy in life” (Dolly Parton, in Bonaguro, 2018, p. 3). What she is saying is that realizing the aims of achieving success, helping to lighten the load of others, and experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose in life is not dependent on how strong or talented or whatever one is. Rather, perseverance, enthusiasm, kindness, and dedication are what enables one to achieve these aims.

8. She wants to be remembered as ...

Dolly repeatedly says that she would much rather be called the “book lady” (Parton, 2020, n. p.) than the “queen of country music” (Miller, 2008) because her father never had the chance to go to school. In other words, her biggest wish is to be remembered as a person who contributed to the development of children. Moreover, she states: “I suppose the only other desire I ever had [other than becoming a singer-entertainer] was to become a missionary” (Miller, 2008, p. 43).

9. So far, three of her biggest successes have been:

- a. Her numerous personal achievements and awards.
 - b. Establishing the Imagination Library, which has already distributed more than a 130 million books among young children under the age of six across the world. The book *Coat of Many Colors* (adapted from her classic song—her favorite among the more than 3000 songs she has written so far) was the 100 millionth book to be distributed (*Business wire*, 2018).
 - c. Dollywood.
10. She experienced the following three challenges/“problems” when she was young and doesn’t want others to suffer or go through them as well (Bonaguro, 2018):
- a. Losing her baby brother shortly after he was born. (She subsequently wrote a song *Angel hill* in his memory to help ease her pain.)
 - b. Her family was desperately (‘dirt’) poor when she was young. It broke her heart to see her mother in particular suffer.
 - c. “She was mocked and bullied because they were poor, and she had to wear ragged clothes.”
 - d. “I’ve struggled enough in my life to be appreciated and understood. I’ve had to go against all kinds of people through the years just to be myself. I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are” (Parton, in Abraham, 2019, p. 63).
11. The first things she remembers about her life (or her earliest recollections)

Dolly often recounts one particular earliest recollection that gave rise to her signature song *Coat of many colors*. This is more or less how the story goes: When Dolly was six, her mother, in the middle of the Tennessee winter, was given a box containing pieces of cloth from a wealthy neighbor. Since Dolly needed a coat, her mother stitched the pieces together and made her a multicolored coat. While she was sewing the coat together, Dolly’s mother told her the Old Testament Bible story of Joseph and his amazing coat and said her coat was more or less the same as Joseph’s coat. Feeling very proud of her new coat, Dolly couldn’t wait to wear it to school, expecting the other children also to like the coat and be proud of her mother’s handiwork. So, the next day, she put it on and rushed off to school ... only to be mocked and laughed at over her precious “coat of rags”. The other children even tried to tear it from her body and shove her into a closet. A tearful Dolly tried her best to tell them that her beautiful coat was as pretty to her and meant more to her than their expensive coats meant to them. She also told them that no matter what they thought, a person is only as poor as she or he wishes to be and that money alone cannot make people happy. They would not listen, and Dolly eventually ran home, feeling hurt, sad, and unhappy and crying bitterly (Hinckley, 2017). (Also see the next section for the sequel to this recollection about how Dolly managed to actively master the pain she suffered at the time.) Her second signature song *I will always love you*, written when she was splitting from her former “employer” and singing partner, Porter Wagoner, is one of many instances during her life when she drew on

her almost uncanny ability to articulate (narrate) her micro-life stories to deal with her pain. (Moreover, that song has come to mean a great deal to countless others.)

The first recollection revolves around three central life themes: First, a poor little girl being mocked, rejected, and hurt by her peers because of her coat of many colors made from cloth remnants. After leaving school, Dolly embarked on a career as a singer, actress, and entertainer, wearing wigs and colorful, extravagant dresses. Numerous magazine writers have made fun of her, and she is constantly “mocked” for her extraordinary attire and appearance—quite similar to what happened in her earliest recollection. However, in behaving in this fashion, she has actively mastered her passive suffering. She is not at all fazed by others’ snipes and comments. Her self-deprecatory comments such as “it costs a lot of money to look this cheap” (BrainyQuote, n.d.; Harper, 2019) are admired and considered indicative of her high emotional-social intelligence.

The second key theme is that one does not need to allow oneself to be hurt by what others think or say about you. Instead, what really matters is what one prefers to believe about oneself. Dolly Parton believes that people should not be defined by their socioeconomic status (in her case, poverty). While not denying that people suffer many kinds of pain, she maintains that one’s mindset or view on a particular matter is key to dealing with all “pain”. Her life story demonstrates how pain or suffering can be converted into social contributions as exemplified by her humanitarian contributions such as providing free books to poor children and writing songs such as her famous *Coat of many colors* with its inspiring message. Hers is a remarkable story: She is who she is, and she makes no attempt to hide behind her celebrity status.

This theme also resonates with a therapeutic truism in clinical hypnotherapy, namely that all hypnosis is self-hypnosis and that people who do not wish to get healthy emotionally cannot be compelled to seek such health.

The third theme, too, is reflected in words from the *Coat of many colors*: “Although we had no money, I was rich as I could be in my coat of many colors that my momma made for me” (Parton, 2000, n.p.). Here, she states that it is love and the belief that one can feel happy, irrespective of one’s circumstances that make one happy. Money, fame, or possessions by themselves cannot bring real happiness.

No wonder that in real life Dolly Parton is a well-loved and revered artist, a rare human being who tirelessly reaches out to people in need.

12.6 Dolly Parton’s Integrated Career-Life Story Narrative

Dolly Parton’s responses to a number of career-story questions/statements appear below. **(It should be emphasized, though, that these responses are based purely on information gathered from numerous publications and actual interviews given by her.)**

12.6.1 Dolly Parton’s Identity, Value, or Power Statement

Dolly is a musically gifted, creative, dynamic, kind, and loyal person who unflinchingly stands by those that she loves and cares about. She will never allow stale, non-sensical,

rules limit her self- and career construction or influence her unique style of singing, acting, dressing, and working. Her capacity to reinvent herself constantly is a rare gift in these turbulent times. Many people deride her because of her signature style (always dressed extravagantly, wearing wigs and heavy make-up). She even does so herself, tongue in cheek. As she often says: “You have no idea how much it costs to look this cheap!” Yet, she is perfectly sure of who she is, and no amount of derision or attempted humiliation ever bothers her because, according to her, “no book should ever be judged by its cover alone”. Beneath the wigs and the make-up and the self-deprecating comments, inside, she is “a real good book;” a real good “story”! (Parton, 2008, n.p.).

If Dolly believes in something, nothing will stop her achieving her goal. She works “24/7, 365” (Parton, 2011, n.p.) to realize her dreams and to continue to make a success of her life. Yes, she, too, does wonder occasionally whether what she is achieving is really worth the sacrifice—which simply proves that she is only human after all! (Parton, 2011).

Dolly has never allowed herself to be defined by what others say about her. Yes, she grew up in extreme poverty, and, yes, she experienced humiliation, rejection, and hurt in her early as well as her later life. Yet, as can be seen, God gave her the wonderful gift of being able to turn hurt into hope.

Dolly is an active, dynamic, living example of someone who does things instead of merely talking about what must or can be done. Above all, she never shies away from finding a way to help people who are poor or who have lost what was precious to them. To this end, she draws on her God-given capacity to write songs, to sing, to create work opportunities for others, to promote young children’s education, and to make people laugh or cry (depending on their need at the time). She is a visionary who inspires others to follow and never let go of their dreams. As happy as she is to help people, she never asks them for advice or gives them advice on what they should do because she believes that only they know deep inside what they really want and need and how best to draw on their own life stories for advice. She maintains that they are the experts on themselves—not she (*Skynews*, 2019, n.p.).

If I (the author) were to sum up her story, it would be in the following words: We can all be stars, can be happy, and can be successful. However, nobody can help us to be happy, successful, helpful, or kind if we do not want to be.

Careers and associated fields of study associated with Dolly Parton’s key life themes and identity, value, or power statement include entertainer (singer, actress, and songwriter) businesswoman, educator, psychologist, therapist, philanthropist, social worker, hairdresser, innovator, and author.

12.7 Dolly Parton's Chosen Career and Her Mission and Vision Statements (as Inferred from the Above Discussion)

To enable her to experience a sense of meaning and purpose in her life, she became a singer, songwriter, movie star, producer, entrepreneur, businesswoman, and philanthropist (**occupational choice**).

12.7.1 Mission Statement (Personal Meaning)

She is happy and successful in her career-life because of her ability to express herself in numerous ways and on numerous forums—by writing and singing hit songs, by acting in acclaimed movies, by writing books, by actualizing her potential as a businesswoman, and by inspiring countless others. She has worked tirelessly, has made the most of her talents, and has become a global star; a rare icon and living legend (Girley, 2019). By making the most of her God-given talents, and in her own inimitable way, she has achieved great success in the fields of music, philanthropy, education, and psychology. A rare celebrity, a genuine star; she has realized her dreams and allows herself to keep on dreaming (Parton, 2012).

12.7.2 Vision Statement (Social Meaning)

Dolly experiences a sense of purpose in her career-life because of the substantial social contributions she has made and is still making, such as helping millions of people deal with their sadness, sorrow, poverty, hurt, and, even more importantly, making their hurt a gift to other people. This includes helping those less fortunate (financially and emotionally) survive even the most serious challenges, promoting the education and dreams of many others, soothing their pain, creating job opportunities, developing the reading ability (education) of countless young people, and sparking the creative powers and hopes of millions of others. Doing so helps her honor the legacy of her beloved parents, whom she will miss sorely until the day she lays her head down (*News Sentinel Staff, 2009*).

This scenario illustrates Dolly Parton's reasons for working as hard as she always has to actualize her potential in the service of not only herself but in the interests of others as well.

Below, I show how Dolly Parton actualizes her career-life story narrative and advances key aspects of life design counseling in the lives of countless other people.

12.8 How Dolly Parton Developed Herself as a Career Project

From a life design perspective that focuses on reflexive consciousness and self-making (Hartung & Santili, 2018; Savickas et al., 2009), Dolly Parton has developed her “self” and career as a project (Cochran, 1992). Put differently: She has used herself (Hartung & Santili, 2018) “as a project for making meaning [that] most values narratability” (p. 11) or, in other words, she has developed the capacity to narrate her own life story, along with adaptability and intentionality as the main outcomes that helped her answer the question: “What purpose does work serve in my life?” (p. 11). Her narrations take the form of verbal discourses, books, and, especially, a large number of songs, numerous radio and TV interviews, transmedia storytelling (Edwards, 2018), as well as interviews with representatives of a broad spectrum of the print media.

Dolly Parton’s actions show how self- and career construction counseling principles are actualized in an authentic, natural way in numerous everyday real-world contexts. A remarkable overlap can be seen between her endeavors and the theory and practice of career construction. She consistently recounts two kinds of stories alluded to by Savickas (1995), namely “those that reveal the client’s preoccupation or central life concern and those that reveal the plot or what they plan to do about the preoccupation”. I connect these stories with “the thread of continuity that is [her] life theme” (p. 4).

Below, I explain in more detail how Dolly Parton’s career-life confirms Savickas’ (2009a) assertion that theory follows practice. The practical enactment of a number of theoretical aspects of career construction counseling (see **bold** below) in Dolly Parton’s career-life are discussed briefly. Stated differently: I show how counseling for self- and career construction theory building is premised on practice, as exemplified by the career-life story of Dolly Parton.

12.8.1 *How Dolly Parton’s Career-Life Confirms Savickas’ (2009) Assertion That Theory Follows Practice*

Dolly Parton **enacts various career-life roles** (e.g. entertainer, actress, singer, songwriter, innovator, employer, entrepreneur, and philanthropist) that enable her to construct her career and herself by participating in a broad array of activities. She is highly adept at **narratability** (recounting or narrating her life story). Her recollection of wearing her coat of many colors to school and being mocked by children, for instance, is an example of the kind of story that reveals a person’s **preoccupation or central life concern**. The kind of story that reveals **the plot** or what the person plans to do about the preoccupation is illustrated by what is arguably Dolly Parton’s **most central recollection** (about the coat of many colors). She recounts how she carried the pain, rejection, and hurt inside her for several years. Then, roughly 10 years after

the incident, one day, she woke up and wrote the song *Coat of many colors*. She recounts that many people with disabilities or had had suffered rejection had told her how much the song meant to them and its healing influence. The message that they took from the song was that people should not allow adversity and challenge to define them. Instead, **they should turn disability, rejection, or rejection into a gift to others.**

We should rather strive to make meaning of our hurt, find a way to overcome hindrances, and thus master actively what we have suffered or are suffering passively. In time, we should **transform the “pain” or situation into triumph and make a social contribution**, much as Dolly Parton and many others have done. The pain she suffered passively became “formative wounds in the Dolly Parton creation story” (Zoladz, 2019, p. 21). In doing so, we **enhance our own experience of a sense of purpose in our lives**. This is possible if we believe we can do so and **actively work towards mastering challenges** thus adding a sense of meaning, hope, and purpose to our lives. Moreover, Dolly Parton repeatedly states that she **never “advises”** people on issues. This is what she said during her commencement (acceptance) speech in 2009: “[I am] nervous because I know that I am supposed to say something meaningful to you. Maybe some good advice for you to always remember. Now I usually try not to give advice. Information, yes; advice, no” (Parton, 2009, September 14, n.p.). Elsewhere, she says: “I don’t try to tell other people what do. People are always asking, ‘What kind of advice would you give?’ and I answer, ‘I don’t give advice. I have some information if you want to know some facts and sometimes how I dealt with something’ ” (Skynews, 2019, n.p.).

Perusal of Dolly Parton’s storyline also uncovers what Savickas (1995) refers to as “the thread of continuity that is [her] life theme” (p. 4). Her stories encourage authenticity narratives (Edwards, 2018) to clarify her **career identity**, which she constantly draws on to elicit inner advice (**autobiographicity**). Sharing these stories also advances her **career adaptability and employability**, and makes her more **career resilient** (enhances her ability to perform competently in rapidly changing, challenging, multidimensional, and often disabling contexts or circumstances) (Rochat, Masdonati, & Dauwalder, 2017). Woven together into a grand narrative, her micro-life stories lucidly and spontaneously reveal who she is from a work and career perspective: **a great artist and entertainer, an educator, an entrepreneur, a therapist, a philanthropist; the kind of work that enables her to convert her preoccupations** or key life themes (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009) **into occupations**. Consistent with counseling for career construction theory, she believes that **each person is unique** and has to establish her or his career identity (SkyNews, 2019, n.p.): “Everybody has a right to be themselves. Everybody has their own path and their own road to walk. And everybody’s talent is different.”

Put differently: Dolly Parton’s **career-life identity** as an artist, a healer, and a philanthropist is revealed by the telling, sharing, and performing of her life stories (LaPointe, 2010) in a way that helps and **inspires** millions of others and enhances their **sense of imagination and creativity** (Maree, 2019a, 2019b; Marr, 2018). Those who listen to her telling (reading, singing, performing) her stories are inspired by watching her “perform” these stories. Her **self-awareness, (critical) self-reflection,**

and reflexivity shape and fine-tune her **career identity**, which she promotes by carefully examining and using her reflections (**reflexivity**) to help her map out her future with a clear plan of positive action to promote forward movement and experience the “ultimate” purposeful life in which she constructs herself and her career (Guichard & Dumora, 2010; Guichard, Pouyaud, De Calan, & Dumora, 2012).

What inspires and impresses me personally, more than any other aspect of Dolly Parton’s career-life, is how she has devoted her entire life to providing holding environments for others.

12.9 Providing a Holding Environment for Millions of People

A brief glance at Dolly Parton’s life-time achievements reveals positive action, forward movement, innovation, and many other career construction-related endeavors. However, above all, they reveal how she has succeeded in providing a sacred space or holding environment for millions of people. Zoladz (2019, p. 21) argues that “much of her music is grounded by an authentic sense of insecurity that she’s worked hard to overcome”. Moreover, Glenville (in Harper, 2019) points out that she clearly has durability—a key ‘holding’ trait that restores a sense of stability in a constantly and rapidly changing and uncertain world. By living out the principle of actively mastering what she has passively suffered, she inspires countless others to draw on their own sense of creativity and imagination to do likewise. The following story illustrates this claim. Dolly’s father was unable to read or write and consequently felt inferior and incompetent his whole life. Dolly’s Imagination Library Book project (referred to earlier) is an example of how she has helped so many people to convert hurt into hope and social contributions. It shows also how she has succeeded in healing herself (dealing with her own pain, namely sadness at the plight of her father who was “crippled” by his inability to read or write) by helping others. Doing so serves as example of making social contributions, making meaning of her situation, instilling hope, and promoting the living of purposeful lives (Bonaguro, 2018).

Knoepp (2019) states that no matter what measure one applies, Dolly Parton’s philanthropic contributions to humanity are staggering and legendary. To back this up, he recalls that two days after the devastating runaway veld fires in western North Carolina and Gatlinburg (Tennessee) in 2016, Dolly Parton established the My People’s Fund to help survivors of the disaster. Around \$12.5 million were raised for Sevier County residents (where Dolly grew up) to help reconstruct their community. In addition, Dolly recently donated \$1 million towards research in search of a cure for the coronavirus (Reuter, 2020).

12.10 Summary

Dolly Parton's inspiring career-life story illustrates the overlap between the theory and practice of self- and career construction counseling and, to a significant extent, also life design counseling. Dolly Parton has been implementing self- and career construction counseling theory in practice in her own career-life to improve the lives of countless others. She has done this without any knowledge of the theory that has underpinned her achievements. I have long maintained that we, as career psychologists, can learn a great deal about our field by observing artists, as is indeed confirmed by this chapter.

After having presented numerous keynote addresses and workshops on self- and career construction and life design intervention, I can state unequivocally that Dolly Parton's life story provides exceptionally helpful material for understanding the theory and mastery of the skills associated with self- and career construction and life design intervention. Unfailingly, after presentations, participants express admiration for and appreciation of Dolly Parton's insight into aspects of our profession (without realizing it). Moreover, careful analysis of her career-life story confirms what many researchers have been saying for years, namely that theory follows practice, and not the other way around.

Chapter 13 is the final chapter of the book.

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