

# POSTMODERN CAREER COUNSELING

A Handbook of  
Culture, Context, and Cases

edited by  
Louis A. Busacca and Mark C. Rehfuss



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# POSTMODERN CAREER COUNSELING

A Handbook of  
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To my late loving father Sam Busacca, Sr., and family.

—*Louis A. Busacca*



To Tracie, Adelyn, Taylor, and Claire, the most incredible women  
I have ever known.

—*Mark C. Rehfuss*



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# Foreword

*Mark Pope*<sup>1</sup>

Insecurity is the predominant psychological characteristic of the postmodern historical period. What Drs. Busacca and Rehfuss have done in this book offers career counselors who are facing such issues with their clients an important perspective that enables them to plan their career counseling interventions accordingly. They accomplished this by gathering together the brightest thinkers and practitioners of constructivist and constructionist career counseling, both the new and the more mature, to write about their passion. And this passion comes through in each of the chapters.

Insecurity about precarious work is an inherent part of career choice and job search, but in the postmodern era it is both the quantity and quality of the insecurity that has changed and is changing. During the industrial era, workers moved even further away from having some felt control of the means and outcomes of production. In some cases, benevolent owners tried to compensate for that inherent insecurity by pledges of lifelong employment, but in many cases workers had to fight for such job security with labor unions as their instrument. And fight they did! In fact there were 4,740 labor strikes in 1937 alone.<sup>2</sup> In the modern era, however, the power of U.S. labor unions plateaued, and during the Reagan presidency the utter defeat of the PATCO air traffic controllers union strike of 1981 set in motion the gradual descent of union power, which continues even to this day. This descent coincided with the beginning of the postmodern era, shortening of the capitalist boom or bust economic cycles, and a

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<sup>2</sup>Brenner, A., Day, B., & Ness, I. (Eds.). (2009). *The encyclopedia of strikes in American history* (p. ii). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

concomitant rise in workforce insecurity for both blue- and white-collar workers. Thus the time is right for this book as postmodern theories and interventions are coming to the forefront of our profession.

What also makes this book unique is the chapter authors' thorough integration of cultural context into the constructionist paradigm in career counseling. Nowhere else in the career counseling and development literature will you find this consistent dedication to such integration. For this reason alone, this book sets a new landmark for our field.

And finally, this book is a very real tribute to the pioneering and continuing work of Dr. Mark Savickas, as both a theoretician and a mentor. His impact on our field is indescribable; in so many ways you can see his soul permeating each chapter. His mentorship is evident in the professional lives of so many of these authors and of the two editors, Louis A. Busacca and Mark C. Rehfuss, as well as in my own.

This is a very special book. A treasure! I hope that you both learn from and enjoy it as much as I have.

A decorative horizontal bar with a grey background and dark grey geometric shapes on the left and right sides. The word "Preface" is written in a white, sans-serif font on the right side of the bar.

## Preface

Two colleagues discuss the reduction in hours in their department and the rapid change of assignments over the past year. The company they work for has been going through restructuring due to offshore outsourcing, and it has implemented new computer programs that have replaced the need for some workers. Several employees in their department have already been laid off or had their hours reduced. Leon, a middle-aged African American with a bachelor's degree, has just been informed of a 40% reduction in his part-time hours due to the company's need to comply with the Affordable Care Act. After 4 years with the company, Leon is worried that he may need to find another job or eventually be laid off. He mentions how difficult it will be for his wife and child now that his hours have been cut, and more so if he loses his job. He is despondent and repeats over and over that he just cannot imagine having to look around for another job again after the struggles he experienced when he was laid off from a full-time position 6 years ago. Leon talks to his colleague Ann about how he struggles to focus on his work and how he just lost an account because of his preoccupation with the uncertainty over his job, career, and family.

Ann has been a full-time employee for 2 years. She is 30 years old, a lesbian, and working on her master's degree. She fears she will be down-sized or asked to take an unappealing position within the company. Her partner of 5 years is happy living in what they consider a gay-friendly community, and she does not want to move. Ann discloses that she too has been preoccupied and not doing her best work for the department lately. Although Ann has her own concerns, she listens and helps Leon understand how much he has contributed to a series of important projects and how he has demonstrated skills that the company increasingly needs. Leon and Ann acknowledge feeling alone and unable to share their fear and insecurity with other employees or with their supervisor. They both feel a lack of guidance from their supervisor and the company

with regard to how to position themselves for possible transition. Leon decides to take advantage of his employee assistance program and seek out counseling services.

Graduate students learning about career counseling and practitioners who provide career services need to know how to assist individuals like Leon and Ann. In the uncertainty of today's workplace, career counselors are increasingly called upon to help clients navigate work and life situations, which are typically in a state of flux. Every client's experience is embedded in a cultural context, which is a factor that makes each client's experience unique. Thus we may also inquire: How might Leon and Ann's culture and context influence their experience at work? The most effective counseling approach for Leon and Ann requires extending the postmodern perspective in general to career counseling in particular. *Postmodern Career Counseling: A Handbook of Culture, Context, and Cases* demonstrates how counselors can holistically apply postmodern career assessment and counseling to clients like Leon and Ann in their social and cultural contexts.

We believe there remains a need for scholarly publications within the counseling profession that highlight the usefulness of the most prominent career counseling models and methods derived from postmodern epistemologies and that also represent a range of diverse populations. For this book, we operationally define the phrase *postmodern career counseling* to include career counseling paradigms and processes derived from the epistemologies of contemporary psychological constructivism, social constructionism, and narrative. We adopt Savickas's (2011a) definition of *career counseling* as "career intervention that uses psychological methods to foster self-exploration as a prelude to choosing and adjusting to an occupation" (p. 151). We conceptualize *culture* as the personal meaning and interpretations clients ascribe to such variables as race, ethnicity, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion/spirituality, socioeconomic status, and intersecting identities. *Context* denotes the influences and interactions that make and remake the individual, such as socioeconomic status, workplace, employment market, educational institutions, geographical location, peers, political decisions, family, historical trends, media, globalization, and community groups (culture, context, and intersecting identities are discussed in more detail in the Introduction). Thus, cultural context becomes essential as the labor force in the United States becomes more diverse, with marked increases in the number of women, non-White, immigrant, and older workers (Arabandi, 2015).

This text demonstrates how postmodern career counseling can meet the needs of individuals preparing for and participating in the new world of work, which has been shaped by the digital revolution and a global economy. The models and methods presented in this book are designed for clients who live in fluid societies, work in flexible organizations, and socialize in multicultural contexts. Within these chapters, you will find theory-based models and methods that students and practitioners may use to counsel clients who have difficulty coping with career transitions, career tasks such as occupational choice, and work traumas (e.g., layoff, illness, and termination).

## Purpose of the Book

We have provided practitioner-friendly resources to help counselors, career practitioners, and students provide career counseling with diverse clients. Two foundational issues underlie the need for this book: (a) update existing career assessment and intervention to respond to the occupational landscape of the 21st century, and (b) expand the multicultural scope of career counseling through career models and processes drawing upon psychological constructivist and social constructionist epistemologies.

First, as the world of work has been restructured, there remains a need to help clients build meaning, build purpose, and revise identity by augmenting traditional career counseling with psychological constructivist and social constructionist principles. As Emmett and McAuliffe (2011) noted, “Constructivist career counseling is, in fact, the most relevant approach to contemporary career counseling in the context of current socioeconomic and workplace realities” (p. 210). Twentieth-century theories that helped guide and prepare people for careers, although quite useful for their time, benefit from being supplemented with a pattern of practices that fully address the needs of today’s workers.

Second, career counseling must encompass broader conceptions of multicultural career counseling. Multiculturalism has become a potent force, stimulating counselors to understand the unique beliefs and truths people from different cultural groups construct about themselves and their life experiences. The 21st century has witnessed new models of career counseling designed for multicultural contexts. This new force, rooted in constructivism and social constructionism, has gained a substantial presence in career counseling and vocational psychology. Nevertheless, some may wonder about the place of multicultural career counseling models within these epistemologies.

Many of the postmodern career counseling models and methods presented in this book are culturally based because they draw upon constructivist and social constructionist epistemologies. Essentially, postmodern approaches in counseling and therapy inherently support and advance culturally sensitive career counseling and assessment (Leong & Hartung, 2000). To insert multicultural models into postmodern paradigms such as narrative, career construction, life design, systems theory, and relational career theory appears unnecessary because multiculturalism is intrinsically present—if applied within the spirit of the epistemology. Nevertheless, counselors should be alert to infusing cultural models such as cultural theory (e.g., Stead, 2004) into career counseling models and methods that privilege the constructivist or interpersonal dimension of career counseling.

The postmodern models and methods that utilize the constructivist or interpersonal dimension of postmodern career counseling may benefit from using the guiding principles of cultural theory to critique multicultural context. Cultural theory emphasizes the importance of language, meaning making, relationship, and power relations (Stead, 2004). The models and methods in this book are based on either a psychological constructivist

or social constructionist epistemology, or both, and in varying degrees. Depending on degree, they pay attention to social context, sexual orientation, race, nationality, disability, age, religion/spirituality, and so on with social constructionism at the extreme. We encourage you to view these two epistemologies on a continuum and determine where the infusion of cultural models would be beneficial.

Postmodern career counseling is a philosophical and psychological framework from which to work. Career counseling becomes not so much a procedure but a philosophical framework for guiding the work of counselor and client. For example, such an expanded view reveals how clients entwine their personal narratives and identities with the stories that saturate their sociohistorical context (Savickas, 2011b). Counselors using postmodern models and methods seek to identify and give voice to the personal story, the local history, the grounded experience, and the marginalized instance. Pope (2010) suggested that “the nuances that lead to assisting adults in mastering their career issues are quite important and can be a detriment in achieving successful outcomes” (p. 731). Thus, we emphasize cultural context, relationship factors, the narrative paradigm, and qualitative assessment to help clients adapt to the changing nature of work in the 21st century. Although we provide examples of career and work issues with clients from various cultures, it is not possible to include examples from all cultures. In-depth discussion of cultures is beyond the scope of this book and can be found in other sources (e.g., Lee, 2013; Sue & Sue, 2016).

In this book, we detail the best practices of postmodern career counseling drawn from case studies and from the experiences of practitioners who apply the models and methods they present. It is important to note that postmodern career counseling is a way of thinking or a set of values, which are illustrated throughout this book as a range of possible approaches and activities that are consistent with psychological constructivist and social constructionist perspectives. In addition, we encourage graduate students, practitioners, and educators to use the models and methods as complementary to traditional career theories rather than as the sole intervention for client career and work-related concerns. The theoretical discussions in Parts I and II provide a foundation for the application chapters in Part III, but they also provide educators with a concise review of concepts and principles highlighted in career counseling courses, making this volume useful as a course text.

Unlike other books on career guidance or vocational behavior, our focus is not on research, nor do we provide a critical analysis of the epistemologies discussed. Practice precedes theory, so career theorists must stay close to practice (Savickas, 2011b). Given the alignment of constructivist and qualitative research, this book offers educators, students, and practitioners the necessary foundation to employ strategies of qualitative inquiry on postmodern career counseling. Because it emphasizes the importance of culture and context embedded in the lives of clients, qualitative research can establish a more empathic and closer connection to participants and

provide a deeper understanding of their experiences (Gergen, 2015). We encourage methods of inquiry such as firsthand accounts, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, interviews, and narratives to examine the critical questions about working and career development in a postmodern era (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005). Our hope is that the procedural case study chapters in Part III provide the impetus toward further empirical inquiry.

We have avoided expressing a perspective rooted in extreme postmodern thought. We view the inclusion of postmodern career counseling as a holistic and integral approach to working with clients' career concerns. An extreme constructivist stance would say that all worldviews are arbitrary, all truth is relative and merely culture bound, and there are no universal truths (Wilber, 2000). But a diamond will cut glass, no matter what words we use for the diamond, and no matter what culture we find them in. Our view values pluralism, which embraces the partial truths contained in both the positivist and postpositivist positions (Wilber, 2000). We agree with Wilber's assertion that the goal of postmodern thought is to arrive at an inclusive, integral, and nonexclusionary embrace.

## **Overview of the Book**

The chapters in this book discuss postmodern career counseling models and methods as ways to augment traditional approaches and enrich career counseling with diverse groups. It offers a fresh perspective. The authors have been vetted, invited, and edited to produce deep and accessible work. This handbook is divided into three parts, with an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter to bookend this material. The Introduction sets the scene for the material you will encounter in the book. Part I, *Perspectives*, introduces the underpinnings of postmodernism and its implications for career counseling. Part II, *Principles*, provides an overview of multicultural career counseling, social constructionism, and qualitative career counseling. Part III, *Procedures*, includes 17 chapters divided into three sections that demonstrate the process of postmodern career assessment and counseling intervention embedded in culture and context, each drawing on a client case vignette. The concluding chapter in the book offers some direction for teaching postmodern principles in career counseling.

### Introduction

The introductory chapter helps counselors understand the occupational landscape of the 21st century. It provides a brief overview of postmodern career counseling and orients the reader to the message of postmodern thought for career counselors.

### Part I: Perspectives

Part I addresses the underpinnings of postmodernism and its implications for career counseling. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the necessity for



and underlying concepts of postmodern thought in career counseling. Busacca traces the transformation in the social organization of work during the 20th century. In particular, he discusses how societal and organizational narratives within each work era provided external guides to help workers feel secure and also how these narratives have lost credibility. The chapter includes an overview of factors responsible for precarious work and how such work has diminished the standardized job, changed the psychological contract between worker and employer, and affected people's identities. In Chapter 2, McAuliffe and Emmett discuss the call for career counseling in counselor preparation from a postmodernist perspective. This chapter also discusses five dimensions of postmodern/constructivist career counseling and presents several core qualities of counselors who work from a postmodernist stance.

## Part II: Principles

Part II offers an overview of the relationship between multicultural career counseling and postmodern perspectives in career counseling, a discussion of social constructionism and discourse analysis, and a discussion of the use of qualitative career assessment in career counseling. In Chapter 3, Evans and Kelchner present the limitations of traditional multicultural models of career counseling and the scope of multicultural training. In Chapter 4, Stead and Davis focus on social constructionism in career counseling. This chapter emphasizes that knowledge is socially constructed through discourse and is contextually embedded. Also discussed are the roles of power and dominant discourses in diverse clients' presenting of problems and how these may offer a springboard for alternative narratives in the co-construction of meaning in the career counseling relationship. In Chapter 5, Wood and Scully provide an overview of qualitative career assessment and discuss the advantages and potential challenges of qualitative career assessments, followed by an examination of the utilization of qualitative career assessments by the counselor and career practitioner.

## Part III: Procedures

Part III provides the perspectives of experts who apply the presented models and methods. These 17 application chapters are organized into three sections based on epistemological perspective: social constructionist, constructivist, and narrative models; variants of social constructionist, constructivist, and narrative models; and systemic and integrative models. Each chapter includes a multicultural case vignette to demonstrate the principles and practices of the given assessment or intervention procedure. A "Practical Application Guide" is included at the end of each chapter to provide a quick way for the reader to search for and review a particular postmodern career counseling model of interest.

Chapters 6 through 16 demonstrate social constructionist, constructivist and narrative-based approaches to career counseling. Informed by the narrative method, Chapter 6 explains the application of the *My Career Story* autobiographical workbook with an African American high school



student. Chapter 7 presents an application of the My Career Chapter with a Malaysian engineer. This narrative–autobiographical approach is based in psychological constructivism. Chapters 8 and 9 cover group-based modalities. Chapter 8 looks at constructivist group career counseling with low-income, first-generation college students. The method is based on the Life Design Group model and career construction theory. Chapter 9 presents the use of early recollections in providing career counseling interventions to offenders using a group format. Chapter 10 demonstrates narrative counseling through the storied approach to career co-construction with an older female client. Chapter 11 uses the genogram as a narrative-based intervention with an economically disadvantaged client, and Chapter 12 demonstrates the use of constructivist-based Life Role Analysis with a transgender client. Chapters 13 and 14 emphasize human subjectivity, meaning making, and individuality. Chapter 13 discusses an Asian American female in relation to personal construct psychology. Consistent with the personal construct system, Chapter 14 demonstrates the use of vocational card sorts with a Latina client, and Chapter 15 explores Possible Selves Mapping with a Mexican American prospective first-generation college student. Chapter 16 is drawn from life design theory and applies the Life Design Genogram to an Italian female transitioning to the world of work in the United States.

Chapters 17 through 19 demonstrate variants of social constructionist, constructivist, and narrative models. The term *variant* refers to models initially derived from either psychological constructivism or social constructionism but that divert from the more common models in theory integration and application. Chapter 17 illustrates a relational cultural career assessment and provides a holistic approach for gathering information to inform career counseling interventions. This model emphasizes the centrality of culture and other forms of diversity in relationships and is based in constructivist meaning-making principles and the social constructionist perspective. Chapter 18 demonstrates the use of solution-focused career counseling, which originated from constructivist thought, with a male military veteran. Chapter 19 presents an application of the One Life Tools narrative framework with an East Asian woman, using face-to-face and Web-based interactions. The framework is based on constructivist meaning-making principles and draws from various theories and models such as narrative, positive psychology, cognitive methods, happenstance approach, and chaos theory of careers.

Chapters 20 through 22 demonstrate systemic and integrative approaches to postmodern career counseling with an emphasis on contextualism. Chapter 20 presents an application of the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) with a Black South African adult male. The MSCI is metatheoretical, based on systems theory and guided by constructivist and narrative meaning-making principles. Chapter 21 uses the action theory of career assessment with clients with chronic illness and disability. Action theory is informed by the social constructionist perspective and narrative. Informed by constructivist meaning-making principles and systems theory, Chapter 22 applies the chaos theory of careers to the case of a female African American college student.

## Conclusion

The concluding chapter, by Busacca and Rehfuss, summarizes the central concepts and themes inherent in postmodern career counseling discussed throughout this book and offers teaching suggestions for counselor educators and others who teach career counseling courses.

## Some Final Thoughts

Our hope is that this collection of writings invites and inspires students, practitioners, and instructors of career counseling and those in counselor education to explore, apply, and teach postmodern career counseling in the cultures and contexts in which clients' working lives are embedded. Perhaps one of the case studies in this handbook will resonate with you. Whether you are beginning your journey in the counseling field or are a seasoned practitioner, this handbook will serve as a resource when you begin the task of helping yourself and others build work and career as an integral part of life imbued with meaning and purpose.

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## About the Editors

**Louis A. Busacca, PhD**, received his doctorate in counseling and human development from Kent State University and holds licensure as a professional counselor in Ohio and as a national certified counselor. He received special recognition as a master career counselor from the National Career Development Association (NCDA) and is certified in clinical rational hypnotherapy from the National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists.

He is currently an adjunct assistant professor of counseling and human services at Old Dominion University and college counselor and adjunct professor of psychology at Lakeland Community College. Prior to this, he was adjunct professor of counseling for Youngstown State University and an instructor at Northeast Ohio Medical University. Dr. Busacca has 7 years' experience as an administrator in higher education as program director for the U.S. Department of Education's TRiO Veterans Upward Bound in Cleveland, Ohio.

Dr. Busacca was a member of the board of directors for the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). He served as president of the Ohio Career Development Association and served on several committees for CACREP and American Counseling Association. He was on the editorial board of *Counselor Education and Supervision*, and the *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, served as ad hoc reviewer for *The Career Development Quarterly*, and currently serves on the editorial board for the *Journal of Counselor Practice* of the Ohio Counseling Association. He is an active member of the American Counseling Association, NCDA, and Ohio Counseling Association.

Dr. Busacca's interests include postmodern paradigms in career counseling, counselor trainee development, counselor education and supervision, stress, coping and trauma, and the neurobiology of depression and anxiety. He has peer-reviewed publications in the areas of constructivist career counseling, career assessment and counseling, counselor trainee career development, and neurobiology in counselor preparation.

**Mark C. Rehfuss, PhD**, received his doctorate in counseling and human development from Kent State University and holds licensure as a professional clinical counselor in Ohio and as a professional counselor in Virginia. He is currently an associate professor and director of the human services distance program in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

Dr. Rehfuss is an editorial board member of *The Career Development Quarterly*, the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, and the *Virginia Counselors Journal* and is an ad hoc reviewer for the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. He has served as chair of the NCDA Research Committee and as president of the Virginia Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and is currently treasurer of the National Organization of Human Services. He has 21 years of experience in higher education administration, curriculum development, and counselor education. He has over 35 peer-reviewed publications and has delivered numerous professional presentations at international and national conferences.

Dr. Rehfuss's research interests include career counseling and guidance, narrative career interventions, counselor education and supervision, online learning, and the integration of the helping professions within family medicine.

Dr. Rehfuss is an active member of the American Counseling Association, NCDA, Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and the Virginia Counseling Association.



## About the Contributors

**Tina Anctil, PhD**, is department chair and an associate professor in the Department of Counselor Education at Portland State University. She is a certified rehabilitation counselor and licensed professional counselor. She directs the clinical rehabilitation counseling program and has been a practicing rehabilitation counselor for over 20 years. In her private practice, she specializes in career counseling with individuals with chronic illness and disability.

**Susan R. Barclay, PhD**, is an assistant professor and coordinator of the college student personnel services and administration graduate program at the University of Central Arkansas. She received her PhD in higher education from the University of Mississippi. Susan holds the GCDF-I certification, is a licensed professional counselor, and is an approved clinical supervisor. Her research interests include student success, career transitions, and the use of career construction techniques in multiple modalities.

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