Toward a Constructivist and Developmental Identity for the Counseling Profession: The Context-Phase-Stage-Style Model

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The constructivist and developmental meta-theories offer foundations for prevention- and health-oriented counseling approaches that target the whole population. In the assessment model proposed here, the counselor is directed toward four specific dimensions of human construction and development. They are the following: social context, life phase, constructive stage, and personality style. It is proposed that such assessment be infused into everyday counseling practice in schools, mental health settings, and colleges while also being a ground for the counselor education curriculum.

The search for a developmental, health-focused approach to assessing and counseling clients is as old as the field of guidance and counseling itself. From Parsons’s (1959) early promotion of vocational guidance for all youth through Albee and Ryan-Finn’s (1993) stress on counselors’ roles in prevention, the counseling field has committed itself to promoting development and enhancing mental health for the whole population. In this sense, the counseling emphasis contrasts with the traditional orientations of other mental health fields, whose root metaphors tend toward the curative and the pathological: “treating” patients, “healing” mental illness, and “remediating” social problems.

Despite the counseling field’s heritage and identity, the counseling field has not at this time fulfilled its wellness-oriented, developmental promise (Blocher, 1988; D’Andrea, 1988; Ivey & Ragazzo-DiGilio, 1991). Three factors might explain this failure. First, despite the emergence of a plethora of developmental theories in the past 30 years (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Kegan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981; Loevinger, 1976; Perry, 1970), actual methods for developmental assessment and counseling have been scarce and often vague (Darden, Guter, & Gazda, 1986; Sprinthall & Thies-Sprinthall, 1983). Second, the dominant culture’s emphasis on independent functioning often prevents individuals from asking for help. Thus, people frequently wait until a crisis or evidence of dysfunction forces them to seek help. Third, market forces—that is, decisions about which mental health services are funded—have historically focused on pathology and have made it difficult for counselors to fully embrace their developmental heritage and identity. As a result of these trends, the counseling field has been increasingly inclined toward a remedial and pathological orientation.

A re-claiming of the counseling field’s commitment to universal development and its embrace of a strengths-oriented approach to helping is in order at this time. Toward that end, the developmental and constructivist meta-theories are suggested to inform such a recommitment. These notions are translated into four dimensions of human functioning: social context, life phase, constructive stage, and personality style (CPSS). This CPSS assessment uses the constructivist and developmental perspectives for the ultimate purposes of increasing clients’ self-awareness and self-acceptance, promoting their determination to manage and maximize their so-called natural inclinations, and enhancing clients’ capacities to address oppressive social conditions that contribute to their and others’ distress. Such a shift in purposes will be likely to require many counselors to substantially rethink their own ways of knowing and their perspectives on the nature of reality (Neukrug & McAuliffe, 1993).

**A SHIFTING WORLDVIEW IN COUNSELING**

A major shift is currently occurring in Western conceptions of the sources of knowledge and authority (Anderson, 1990). In an era sometimes labeled “postmodern” because of its pervasive skepticism about all attempts to define reality and truth, challenges to previous “givens” dominate the frontiers of thinking. Four emerging trends in the counseling...
field are consistent with these challenges to the hegemony of what might be called "normal practice" (Kuhn, 1970):

1. From sole location of client issues in the individual to recognition of the social contexts in which all humans are embedded (e.g., Gergen, 1991; Ivey, 1991)
2. From a fixation on pathology to an emphasis on strength and development (e.g., Blocher, 1982; Vacc & Loesch, 1994)
3. From a research focus on objective truth-seeking to an embrace of multiple subjectivities (e.g., Nelson & Poulin, 1997)
4. From a dominant reliance on remediation to a focus on education and prevention (e.g., Albee & Ryan-Finn, 1993)

All of these trends are guided by a continuing suspicion of claims of finality and expertise, a suspicion guided by appreciation of the social construction of reality. Postmodern thinking is characterized by severe doubt about whether human beings can construct anything alone, without being open to the dialogue among colleagues, clients, genders, classes, and all other socially constructed groups. In this sense, counselor humility and openness to new experience are encouraged (Burbules & Rice, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1992).

Up for redefinition are issues of who defines the good and true, who makes policy, and who is included and excluded in mental health work. Power relations between counselor and client, researcher and participant, diagnoser and patient, policy maker and public are consistently deconstructed (Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin, & Stowell-Smith, 1995); that is, these issues are examined for their origins in a particular culture and time. All interactions and discourses are recognized as historically and culturally situated.

These themes are also central to constructive-developmental assessment. Indeed, the very possibilities of counseling assessment and intervention are themselves subject to scrutiny in an ever shifting skepticism about the nature of helping.

Despite what might seem like a shaky foundation for any practice, we have ventured in this article to offer counselors a model that highlights client health, meaning making, and development. However, given the just mentioned call for critical self-reflection, the CPSS model itself must be recognized as a socially situated construction. Counselors are challenged to consider one of its main virtues to be its own call for critical self-reflection; that is, counselors are asked to consistently deconstruct their own personal and cultural history, to situate themselves as social constructors.

However, critical self-reflection does not imply paralysis. Although methods and truths might be relativized in a postmodern counseling orientation, they are not rejected. Temporary commitments to counseling strategies or assessment models, chosen tentatively in particular contexts, are still viable. Counselors, and model-builders, are thus asked to be committed relativists of a sort, in Perry's (1970) terms.

A comparison between a traditional pathological view and what is here called the constructivist-developmental perspective can be instructive as an illustration of the paradigm shift that is implied by the CPSS model (see Table 1). It should be noted that Table 1 illustrates the extremes of these positions. The pathological view was born in a context of treating severe dysfunction. The constructive-developmental view does not exclude serious dysfunction but rather asks counselors to give up an expert-based, individualistic orientation in favor of a self-reflective, culturally attuned, and egalitarian orientation toward the subjective creation of the counseling act.

**CONSTRUCTIVISM AND DEVELOPMENT: FOUNDATIONS FOR THE CPSS MODEL**

Constructivism and development are the driving notions behind culturally sensitive, wellness-oriented assessment. Both evoke a worldview that honors diversity, values equality among all individuals, recognizes the influence of social context on lives, and emphasizes the conditions that enhance mental and emotional growth for all human beings.

**Constructivism**

From the constructivist perspective, all human beings are active creators of experience, not passive receptors of an objective reality. To know is to construct, not to find. To paraphrase Neimeyer (1993), constructivists view knowledge as an invented and constructed meaning system, rather than as a free-standing, stable, and external entity. Consequently, constructivists recognize that there are potentially, as Gergen and Daye (1992) proposed, a "multiplicity of accounts of reality," and recognize "the historical and cultural contingency of each" (pp. 179-180).

Constructivism has been used variously to refer to a number of traditions (e.g., Kelly, 1955; Piaget, 1963). For example, social constructionism, whose origins are in the field of social psychology, emphasizes that meaning is inevitably made within an interpersonal and cultural context (Olson, 1989). The social constructionist perspective relativizes meanings as socially derived creations rather than references to already existing essences (Anderson, 1990). Human beings are always "in the language" of their culture, time, and place in history, although they can also take a more or less critical stance toward those influences on their meaning making. Individuals are not necessarily passive "victims" of their social context, because they can take increasing responsibility for the sense they make as they develop, according to the constructive developmental view (Kegan, 1994).

In this article the term constructivist is used as an umbrella term to incorporate all of these traditions, but a distinction is also drawn between social constructionism and developmental constructivism. From the overall constructivist perspective, every counselor, like every client, is engaged in the act of making
TABLE 1

Differences Between Traditional and Constructivist-Developmental Views of Counseling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Traditional Pathological View</th>
<th>Constructivist-Developmental View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locus of problem?</td>
<td>In individual</td>
<td>Among individual, family, and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of problem?</td>
<td>Weights &quot;nature&quot; versus &quot;nurture&quot;</td>
<td>Multisystemic: &quot;biopsychosocial,&quot; culturally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peripherally</td>
<td>situated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of culture?</td>
<td>Nonsensuous; embedded in individualistic,</td>
<td>Seen as one descriptor; dysfunction seen as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eurocentric assumptions</td>
<td>logical response to developmental history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family?</td>
<td>Peripherally</td>
<td>Values gender, culture, and other frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment?</td>
<td>Search for 'best' treatment</td>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling relationship?</td>
<td>Hierarchical, patriarchal</td>
<td>Use network interventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from seminar presentation by A. E. Ivey, University of Massachusetts, Fall 1995.

sense of experience. The counselor is not a passive receptor of client input or an expert who interprets the "true" meaning of client behavior or does out curative prescriptions. Counselors and clients together co-construct "narratives" in counseling (White & Epston, 1991). All human explanations, including counseling theories, can be considered 'stories' rather than essential truths.

Counselor awareness of the constructed nature of reality can reduce the distance between the counselor and client, making counseling a collaboration between two (or more) fundamentally equal partners. Constructivism as it is used here implies respect, multiple perspective-taking, humility, willingness to reconstruct meaning, and a recognition that there is no 'essential' counseling truth or theory that applies to all clients in all circumstances (Sexton, 1997). Constructivism has been translated into counseling practice by such writers as Hoyt (1996), Monk, Winslade, Crocket, and Epston (1997); and White (1993).

Development

The second major foundation for the CPSS assessment models is that of development. Developmental theorists propose that humans evolve in regular ways through qualitatively different psychosocial phases (or "eras") and constructive stages (or "cognitive structures"). Developmental movement requires the performance of tasks of increasing complexity.

Developmental theories can be loosely divided into two branches (Rodgers, 1989): (a) the so-called life span or psychosocial approaches, which in this article are called phase theories, and (b) the cognitive or constructive stage theories. The life phase theories, in the Gumbler (1933), Havighurst (1972), and Super (1963) traditions, pay attention to the culturally expected tasks of growing up and growing old, or the "when and what" of development. In contrast, cognitive, or as Kegan (1982) suggested constructive, stage theories come from Piaget's (1963) tradition of positing universal structures of knowing that evolve based on a person's encounter with challenging environments, and his or her subsequent accommodations to new ways of knowing.

All development: theories suggest that human beings can evolve in vital ways if the environment is sufficiently challenging and supportive. It is the developmentally oriented counselor's task to (a) consider the client's readiness and (b) contribute to the development-enhancing environmental conditions of challenge and support.

THE CPSS MODEL: ASSESSING CLIENT CONTEXT, PHASE, STAGE, AND STYLE

The CPSS model spans four strands of constructivist and developmental thinking. These four dimensions, like other organizing heuristics, can provide the counselor with a framework for applying the diverse constructivist and developmental theories. The key words Where, When, How, and What are added as a cue for each dimension:

1. C: social context, or Where?
   Key question: "Where is the client placed in the circumstances around him or her and how do these various contexts affect how he or she makes meaning?"

2. P: life phase, or When?
   Key question: "When will (or has) the client engage(d) in the sequence of age-related, psychosocial tasks which are expected of a person in this culture?"

3. S: constructive developmental stage, or How?
   Key question: "How does the client currently make meaning, that is, what is his or her orientation toward sources of knowledge?"

4. S: personality style, or What?
   Key question: "What tendencies does the person show in his or her interests, abilities, values, and temperament?"
Context or "Where"

The context element of the CPSS model is especially guided by the previously mentioned social constructionist notion that all human meaning making is inextricable from the human communities in which we participate. Social constructionist-oriented thinkers (e.g., Gergen, 1991; Gergen & Kaye, 1992; Mead, 1934; Vygotsky, 1978) are characterized by Rorty (as cited in Olson, 1989) in the following way: "Social constructionists understand reality, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities... that define or 'constitute' the communities that generate them" (p. 3). Of course, this very CPSS assessment model is itself socially constructed, having been created within a discourse community of counselors and researchers. The model is thus limited by the perspectives, biases, and values of these communities. From this perspective, the social dimension in human experiencing is so pervasive that who we are at any given time cannot be separated from our past and present interactions with others. According to social constructionist thinkers, even when we are alone our very thoughts and meanings are bound up in the language, social categories, and social values of our place and time. Social constructionist thinking can lead the counselor and client to appreciate a diversity of possible interpretations of events. Such awareness can be turned inward by counselors as they reflect on the socially constructed lenses through which they themselves create reality, assess clients, and propose treatment options. Through this dimension, counselors and clients are asked to look through the specific lenses of family, community, and cultural influences on experiencing. The eight specific social identities of gender, ability, race, religion, ethnicity, age, class, and sexual orientation (GARREACS) are highlighted as dimensions of culture in this model. Attention to these social identities sensitizes the counselor to the dual issues of internalized client assumptions based on these contexts and to external issues of power and oppression that clients encounter. Figure 1 illustrates some of the contexts that influence clients' and counselors' lives and perspectives.

Assessing context. Through context assessment the counselor considers the impacts of the situation, the family, the community, the nation, and the culture on clients' self-definitions and problem constructions and considers how each of these systems might be accessed for effective treatment interventions. Sample interview probes for assessing clients' social context are listed as follows:

- How would you describe your family's social class?
- What were the messages to you about (work, love, play)?
- What religious tradition, if any, are you part of? What part does religious faith play in your life?
- How would you describe your ethnic heritage? What does it mean to you?
- How does gender role influence your expectations, and your perceptions of opportunities?

Many clients will be naive about social construction, because it is counterintuitive to the notion of the autonomous self and it contrasts with the dominant Western ethos of "hyperindividualism" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swider, & Tipton, 1985). To balance this individualistic bias, Western counselors themselves will need to continue experiencing social constructionism, multicultural awareness, family and organizational systems, and social justice issues to be alert to their own and clients' context issues.

One method for assessing context consists of the counselor's probing the various influences of some or all of the eight social identities named earlier, that is, gender, age, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, class, and sexual orientation. For example, the first author found that the working class background of a career-undecided young woman provided a clue to her pessimistic vision of career fulfillment and a disinclination toward pursuing education. She doubted the possibility of working toward a satisfying career goal and had no role models for pursuing education. The counselor helped the client to consider her interests and abilities as markers of career direction.

Such a client may also face external barriers to career advancement. In context assessment, issues of power and oppression can also be highlighted. For example, the counselor can probe racial or ethnic identity awareness levels in clients (e.g., Cross, 1991; Hardiman, 1982; Helina, 1990; Jackson, 1975; Sue & Sue, 1980). In much of the Western world, a person of color's naive status regarding racial identity, for example, is commonly associated with internalized oppression and low self-esteem (Cross, 1991). Such assumptions can be challenged in counseling, as described in feminist counseling (Chaplin, 1992) and in the psychotherapy of liberation (Ivey, 1995).

Implications of context assessment for intervention. A three-step guide for constructive-development assessment and counseling can be summarized as Explore-Know-Act. At the risk of oversimplifying both ethnicity and the counseling process, the sequence might be portrayed in the context domain in the following way:

1. Explore the situational, family, community, and cultural contexts, or the "facts" (e.g., "My German family and culture valued independence, achievement, and controlling emotions.").
2. Know the implicit socially derived assumptions that are embedded in their stories, that is, the "meanings" (e.g., "I have taken independence as 'the way to be.' While it serves me well at times, it hurts my ability to stay connected in discussions with my partner.").
3. Act (i.e. accept/manager/change), after deciding which social assumptions; values, manners, and conditions are helpful or not helpful to them at this place and time (e.g., "I will try to balance the separate style I've learned..."
by engaging in conversations with my partner, even when I feel tense.

In general, context-oriented intervention directs the counselor to assist clients in two ways: (a) to help clients to re-write their socially embedded family, community, and cultural narratives into ones that are more useful to them at this time and place; and (b) to support clients in engaging in social actions in order to change systems of power relations.

**Life Phase or “When”**

The notion of psychosocial phase will here represent an interval of time in the life span during which certain themes are ascendant. The individual who accomplishes the central tasks of that era is likely to function more effectively in society. A phase is marked by the coalescence of (a) internal physical, cognitive, and emotional readiness on the part of the individual; and (b) societal expectations. The following is a summary of developmental phase principles based on Havighurst (1972), Erikson (1963), and Rodgers (1989):

1. Individual growth is continuous, but it can be divided into periods, or “life phases,” for descriptive purposes.
2. Individuals in a given culture share certain general characteristics in each life phase.
3. Society makes certain relatively uniform demands on all individuals; these demands differ from phase to phase.
4. “Developmental crises” occur when individuals perceive the demand to alter their behavior and learn new things (e.g., establish intimate adult relationships; choose an occupation, go to school, reassess career role).
5. Although the crisis or task appears in its “purest form” at one phase, preparation for it occurs at earlier phases, and it may arise again during a later phase.
6. This task must be mastered (e.g., childhood autonomy) before the individual can successfully move on to related later phase tasks (e.g., career growth, ability to be intimate in young adulthood).
7. Successfully meeting the crisis by learning the required task leads to societal approval, positive feelings, and success with later tasks.
8. Failure to adequately address a task leads to disapproval by society.
Thus, for example, the dominant groups in Western societies expect school-age children to be industrious at their school work, adolescents to begin interacting romantically with others, adults to teach and mentor the younger generation, and elders to shift gears toward modified career and leisure pursuits. Cultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic class play important roles in these expectations. Some broad developmental tasks, such as preparation for mating, can be concretized by particular subcultures into strict rules, such as marriage to a heterosexual person. Phasic tasks will be viewed here as the more general imperatives that are partly biologically and partly socially driven.

Counselors can be guided by the major psychosocial development theories such as (a) the life span formulations of Erikson (1963) and the follow-up identity work of Josselson (1987), Marcia (1966), and Holland, Daiger, and Power (1980); (b) Havighurst's (1972) work on school-age youth; (c) both Levinson's (1978, 1986) and Sheehy's (1976) observations on life seasons and passages; (d) Vaillant's (1977) notion of mature defense mechanisms; (e) Super's (1963) model of career phases; and (f) Gould's (1979) adult transformations theory. (See Figure 2.)

Assessing phase. Counselors might begin to assess phasic tasks by exploring clients' levels of engagement in the tasks of their life phase. Some phase assessment questions might cover areas of body image and self-esteem (especially with adolescents), career match and discontent (e.g., with midlife adults), and the task versus relationship balances of any life phase. For example,

- At this time in your life, how is the balance of work, family, and leisure going for you?
- Name some skills you have or things that you are good at. How do you express these skills?
- How are you doing in school? How do you get along with your classmates?
- How do you feel about how you look?
- At this time in your life (e.g., older adulthood) what do you see as important?
- How important is the idea of career to you?
- How satisfied have you been with your occupation? What might need to change, if anything? Have you been considering alternatives?
- As you look back over your life so far, what are you proud of?

The counselor probes just listed can evoke responses to such life phase themes as identity, competence, intimacy, career purpose, autonomy, achievement, and nurturing. If clients are unprepared to address such issues, counselors can help them to become aware of societal expectations, and together they can construct responses to these demands.


Whether or not an instrument is used, the counselor can seek out and honor the client's own constructions of developmental tasks during the interview. The counselor might especially note gaps between client readiness and societal expectations. If clients themselves are unaware of phasic expectations, counselors can use their knowledge of life phase issues to ask questions and to anticipate client struggles. Counselors might note "Is the client alert to the issues of a particular life phase, or is she he avoiding the challenge?" For example, a young adult who is floundering in career (Super, 1963) can be helped to understand and to actively engage in the "exploration" task. Other examples of phase alertness include the counselor's looking for how an adolescent constructs the "dating" task, how a young adult envisions relationship commitments, and how the midlife adult reappraises earlier life role choices.

Implications of phase for intervention. Clients' awareness of psychosocial phase tasks sets the stage for them to engage in activities such as studying, dating, exploring occupations, becoming assertive, increasing intimacy, and reappraising life roles, to name a few examples. Counselors can help clients to anticipate and prepare for upcoming phases and transitions through one-to-one guidance, bibliotherapy, and psychoeducational programs. Examples of phase-related interventions include assertiveness and social relations workshops in college, instruction in handling peer pressure in adolescence, career exploration in early adulthood, career reentry groups for homemakers, marriage enrichment seminars for couples who are launching children, midcareer reappraisal programs for adults, and "deceleration" planning for older adults.

In individual work, counselors might challenge clients to engage in "expected" transitional struggles while "normalizing" the distress that accompanies such transitions. Counselors might also suggest clients to accept the fact that they are "off-time" from the norm on some life phase tasks such as having offspring in young adulthood or advancing in career during middle adulthood, and to choose alternative, less conventional paths to satisfaction and achievement. Counselors can also help clients to deconstruct rigid interpretations of phasic tasks (like, "I must be successful in my occupation and I must raise children at the same time" or "I must marry and have children in young adulthood"). Counselors thus free clients of rigid, internalized expectations. Finally, clients who are resistant to acting on a phasic task might be challenged to do so (e.g., "I'm scared to move out from my parents' home and go away to college").

Overall, the counselor might use the Explore-Know-Act approach to constructivist-developmental assessment and intervention. In the case of phase, clients can be helped to (a) explore their life phase, (b) increase their knowledge of phasic tasks, and (c) act on those tasks.
FIGURE 2
Examples of Phase

Stage or "How"

Stage theory might be called "developmental constructivism" because it is concerned with progressive changes in how individuals make meaning. A stage represents the set of common organizing principles (Kegan, 1994) that individuals use in constructing experience. Stage theory is developmental in that it posits regular, progressive change in how those meaning-making principles evolve.

The notion of stage is closely allied with epistemology, or how the person conceives of knowing. Indeed, stage theory might be called evolutionary epistemology. Change
in stage is progressive in that it represents individuals' taking increased responsibility for the sense that they make (Kegan, 1994). As meaning making evolves, thinking becomes less rigid, exclusive, simple, and dogmatic. Thinking also becomes more flexible, open, complex, and tolerant of differences. It is assumed in stage theory that increased constructive capacity is generally more adaptive and gives the individual more meaning-making options, at least in contemporary "schooled" societies. Other terms for stage are order of consciousness (Kegan, 1994), position (Perry, 1970), and way of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986).

The limitations of the stage construct include the risk of rigidly stereotyping and "totalizing" a person's constructive tendencies. Counselors must remind themselves that the notion of "stage" is itself an artifact or a construction, and it cannot represent any individual's total way of making meaning. It is likely that much meaning making is situational and contextual and that stage refers to a "more or less" tendency to use certain constructive capacities in specific situations. This fluid notion has been called the "soft stage" approach to constructive development.

Some of the stage theories that can be useful to the counselor in assessing the client's meaning-making orientation include Piaget's (1963) cognitive development, Levinger's (1976) ego development, Perry's (1970) ethical and intellectual development, Belenky et al.'s (1986) women's ways of knowing, both Kohlberg's (1981) and Gilligan's (1982) moral development, and Kegan's (1982) subject-object development. Figure 3 shows a simplified integration of common elements in some stage theories.

Assessing stage. Both formal and informal methods might be used to assess a client's general stage tendency. During a session, a counselor can use a semistructured interview approach (Vacc & Juhnke, 1997) to probe a client's general meaning-making orientation. A key stage-evoking question is, "How did you come to decide or know...[e.g., that this gender role is necessary, or that a person cannot marry someone of another ethnic group, or that you must follow the career path that your parents have preferred]?"

Some constructive development-evoking questions (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1985) follow. All are meant to evoke how the client comes to know in general.

- What lets you know that that is (good, right, important)?
- Why is that important to you?
- What's at stake here?
- What makes you most (nervous, angry, etc.) about that?
- If it were to turn out another way, what would be the cost for you?
- How would you have liked this to turn out? Why?

Following the client's initial response, the counselor can then probe the assumptions used to construct a particular meaning through a 'spiraling downward' technique, in which the counselor continues to ask epistemology-evoking questions until the client reaches the ultimate ground of his or her knowing.

An inexact cue to epistemology might be the brevity of a client's response: Those who generally rely on "outside" sources of knowing (e.g., conventions, parents, religious tradition, peers, authorities) seem to provide brief, minimal responses to such epistemology-evoking probes (Lahey et al., 1985). More 'internal' or 'self-authoring' knowers tend to offer the method they use of considering pros and cons to come to a decision. They may weigh others' (such as parents', teachers', and counselors') suggestions, but they hold their own internal weighing procedure—whether it be logic or intuition—as the ultimate criterion for making life decisions. If they take others' suggestions, it is with awareness that they have a choice not to do so.

Stage-evoking interview methods are elaborated in the Ways of Knowing Interview Schedule (Belenky et al., 1986) and the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey et al., 1985). More formal stage assessment methods include recognition tasks, in which the client must choose responses from options on an inventory (e.g., Erwin, 1983; Kitchener & King, 1981; Moore, 1987). Each assesses a person's view of how knowledge is gained, progressing from a more external or authoritarian position through a relativistic orientation. A more intensive and time-consuming measure of Perry's (1970) theory is Baxter-Magolda and Porterfield's (1988) Measure of Epistemological Reflection. Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test determines moral reasoning using the Kohlberg (1981) schema. Levinger's (1976) stage theory of ego development can be measured by his Sentence Completion Test.

Implications of stage for intervention. In general, counselors can selectively "match" (support) or "mismatch" (challenge) client stage assumptions during the course of counseling (Sanford, 1962). Developmental constructivist counseling consists of providing an optimal mismatch between the client's current dominant ways of knowing and his or her next potential way of knowing. This "stretching" of constructive capacity toward the next viable way of knowing has parallels to Vygotsky's (1978) notion of movement through the "zone of proximal development." The counselor can be a part of the development-enhancing environment. For example, a 52-year-old client concerned about family proclivities against leaving the family business was helped by the first author's offering both support, in acknowledging his love of his family and sensitivity to their needs and desires, and challenge in asking "What would you want?" The client discovered his own interests and preferences and began to move to a more self-authored way of knowing. Other stage-challenging counseling strategies are described by Ivey (1991), Kegan (1982), Kellner and Slepitzer (1976), McAuliffe (1993), and McAuliffe and Strand (1994).

**Style or What**

The notion of style will be defined here as an individual's relatively consistent inclinations and preferences across contexts. Sometimes the words "personality traits" and "types" are used to represent the person's consistent orientations toward constructing meaning and acting. The more biological
FIGURE 3
Examples of Stages or “Constructive Orientations”

Note. From Kegan (1982), Loewinger (1976), and Basseches (1984).
	notion of “temperament” (e.g., Kagan, 1995) may be another useful construct for helping clients to know, accept, and manage their inclinations. Such terms as artistic, energetic, even-tempered, field independent, investigative, compulsive, reactive, and extraverted are common descriptors of what we will here call “style.” Personality styles originate in some combination of genetic inheritance and learning experience (Holland, 1985; Kagan, 1995; Krumholtz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976). Like stage inclinations, personality styles should be recognized as constructed approximations of human experience and should be arrayed on a continuum rather than being reified or totalized in all-or-nothing terms. Counselors must be vigilant to deconstruct their and others’ uses of style constructs in favor of an ongoing reflexivity about the use and misuse of such labels (Parker et al., 1995).

The notion of style contrasts with that of stage in that style represents long-term constructive preferences, whereas stage represents current constructive capacity (Kegan, 1994). A second distinction between the two is that personality style is relatively long-term and consistent over time, whereas stage tendencies are mutable—they evolve under development-enhancing conditions. Both notions, however, share a constructivist dimension in that each calls attention to the lenses that humans use to create experience. Both stage and style theories are also similar in that they concern themselves with individuals’ consistent tendencies across life contexts, either in how the person knows (i.e., stage) or in what environments, people, interests, values he or she prefers (i.e., style).

A central value of using style assessment is that the variety in personality styles helps counselors and clients to appreciate human diversity or, in Myers (1980) paraphrase of the biblical phrase, respect for “gifts differing.” Style assessment can help counselors and clients to celebrate the range of assets, interests, and inclinations that are represented in the human community. A major benefit of a style assessment is the encouragement of a nonjudgmental stance—the recognition within individuals, families, and communities that styles can often be constructed as merely varying, neither wrong nor right, neither ill nor healthy. The range of normal variation in styles can explain much human behavior without reference to notions of pathology.
and Smek-Morgan (1997) even suggested that personality disorders be reconceptualized as being on a continuum, with one end being a more adaptive inclination. Style assessment can also complement the search for personality "disorder." All notions of both style and disorder are, of course, socially constructed and are therefore subject to probing deconstruction of their historical origins and their place within current social relationships (Parker et al., 1995).

Specific style theories that might be useful for the counselor include person-environment matching theory (Holland, 1985), personality type theory (Myers, 1980), and Ivey’s reconceptualization of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994), personality disorders as a continuum of personality styles (Ivey et al., 1997). Some style theories are outlined in Figure 4.

Assessing style. The counselor can informally assess style by asking key questions during the counseling interview. Examples of style probes include the following:

- What work environments do you prefer (or have you preferred)?
- Name some of your interests and favorite school subjects.
- How do you prefer to socialize?
- Where do you tend to get your energy?
- How do you tend to make decisions—carefully, by considering much data, or quickly, or somewhere in-between?
- Are you easily distracted by events and persons in the environment, or can you easily "tune out" such potential stimuli?
- Tell me about your relative preference for: creative activity? hands-on work? influencing others? analyzing information? teaching and helping people?

A sound knowledge of current trait and personality theories is required for such an assessment.

Style can also be assessed by formal instruments or brief questionnaires (e.g., the Self-Directed Search, Holland, 1990; the Personality Style Inventory, Ivey et al., 1997; the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Myers, 1980). Regardless of assessment method used, it is paramount from the constructivist perspective that the client's own meanings are evoked by the counselor and reflected on by the client. Goldman's (1972) method of demystifying tests by referring the client back from the inventoried summary to the original items and responses on the questionnaires can serve that purpose.

Implications of style for intervention. Knowledge of clients' styles lays the foundation for helping them to (a) explore, (b) know, and (c) act on (accept, manage, or compensate for) such tendencies. In the case of styles that are "assets," clients can be helped to recognize and value those as "gifts" and to match those preferences with congruent work settings, tasks, friends, and partners. In contrast, when there is a mismatch between clients' styles and the environments (e.g., work activities) they encounter, counselors can encourage clients to compensate for or avoid those activities that call for their "weaker" side. For example, the non-detail-oriented client might find an assistant to help her keep financial records for her organization. Similarly, the extrovert who must study or perform other isolated tasks can be encouraged to compensate for his strong social needs by learning to resist social engagements until tasks are accomplished.

Counselor's Worksheet for Constructive-Developmental Assessment

A worksheet for constructive-developmental assessment is provided in the Appendix. It might serve as a guide to assessing clients' constructions and developmental tasks and capacities. In addition, in the self-reflective constructivist tradition, the worksheet asks counselors to "foreground" their own constructs by reflecting on their own social contexts, life phase issues, constructive stage tendencies, and personality style inclinations.

ILLUSTRATION OF CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT: THE CASE OF MARIA

To illustrate how constructivist-developmental assessment might be integrated across the four CPSS dimensions, the case of Maria is summarized here. Maria is a 23-year-old woman who arrived at the counselor's office at the local community college saying that she needed to do something new in her life but was not sure what. Maria reported that at the time of counseling she had "no future—no partner, little money, few friends, no career." She had been divorced for 8 months, from a man who was frequently verbally and occasionally physically abusive. She had supported her husband through college by doing retail work.

Maria's 63-year-old father was a retired construction worker and her 61-year-old mother was a supermarket store clerk. Maria was raised as a Catholic in an Italian American family. She maintained some allegiance to her faith for reasons she could not fully explain except to say, "That's how I was brought up." Her parents were not supportive of the divorce nor of any professional career aspirations. They wished that she would move back home to the small town where they lived. At the time of counseling, Maria lived in a medium-sized city, 2 hours away from both her parents and her two older siblings.

Assessment. The CPSS assessment was woven into the counseling process; it was not done in sequential order, as might be assumed from the worksheet (i.e., Appendix). The counselor also attended to pathology-related constructions as exemplified by the first three axes of the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Maria's hopelessness about her future and discouragement related to her divorce pointed to a possible adjustment disorder with depressive elements.

In the first sessions the male counselor assessed Maria's constructions and her development. Some issues stood out from the constructivist-developmental probing. Under context, Maria's "working class" origins were a clue to her low
expectations of career achievement and fulfillment. She expressed stereotypes of women's career options. Other context probes evoked family rules and styles and internalized cultural norms about not leaving the family, geographically or otherwise.

For phase, the counselor focused on young adult issues of identity and intimacy (Erikson, 1963) and sub-issues of competence and autonomy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Stage assessment revealed that Maria relied on external authorities and conventions, such as family and religious norms, as her sources for meaning. However, Maria was ready to change this reliance, due to her two disappointments with authority figures (Belenky et al., 1986): her experience of spousal abuse and her parents' failure to support her in her divorce. These experiences had led her to question her reliance on outside authority. With this readiness in mind, the counselor evoked Maria's own perspectives on lifestyle, career, and morality—she was ready for new ways of making meaning.

Maria was initially unable to positively identify her styles, or inclinations, interests, and values, and she expressed a sense of inadequacy in relation to the few tendencies that she could name. For example, instead of "introverted," she saw herself as "too shy," and instead of "artistic," she saw herself as "too different from people I grew up with." Career interest and personality type assessment helped Maria to name and reframe her preferences positively as assets.

Intervention. The counselor and client engaged in eight sessions that addressed the four CPSS dimensions. Using a constructivist approach (e.g., Hoyt, 1996), the counselor (a) emphasized the interpersonal encounter in the sessions, (b) offered self-disclosure, (c) stayed open to shifts in his understanding of the client, (d) opened up the counseling process by sharing his thinking and requesting feedback from Maria, and (e) gave explanations of all interventions offered. All four CPSS dimensions were useful in helping Maria to construct new stories (White & Epston, 1991) and in challenging her to develop.

As Maria examined family, community, and cultural rules (i.e., context), she realized that they were themselves constructions and were therefore subject to deconstruction and reconstruction based on the evidence she brought from her
own life. For example, she challenged her social-class-based assumptions about career and explored her occupational interests enthusiastically. The counselor helped her to take these internalized rules as "object," rather than being "subject" to them (Kegan, 1982), by "stretching" her meaning-making with "bridges"—that is, people and stories that represented both some of her current characteristics as well as new ways of knowing. One person she interviewed, for example, was a female Catholic social worker, one who showed qualities of independent thinking, leadership, cross-cultural appreciation, and the ability to live on her own, while also sharing Maria's working class origins and Catholic faith. Maria also connected with her own family in new ways by sharing her own points of view and making assertive statements when needed. Thus, Maria's recognition of family, community, and cultural issues helped her to "disembled" (Kegan, 1982) from their tyranny over her and to move toward a consistently self-authoring way of knowing. On the phase dimension, the counselor highlighted the young adult career exploration and intimacy tasks. Maria was encouraged to accept her career indecision as "normal," and she approached the exploration tasks with increasing relish. The task of establishing intimacy was addressed partially through the counseling relationship, by means of counselor self-disclosure and modeling of vulnerability, by role plays of authentic communication, and by practice assignments involving Maria increasing emotional expressiveness with friends.

Third, the counselor focused on stage issues by selective challenge and support of her seemingly "conformist" (Loevinger, 1976) epistemological assumptions. The counselor supported Maria's awareness of and sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others while encouraging Maria's emerging ability to say: I will think and choose for myself. This in turn contributed to more congruent career and relationship decisions. Maria was ready for such a challenge, because she was already beginning to question the hegemony of family and cultural rules when she began counseling.

Finally, style assessment led Maria to increase her self-awareness of and appreciation for her more introverted, artistic, and enterprises inclinations. This awareness helped her integrate her sense of identity, that is, her appreciation of her particular characteristics. The counselor was then able to assist her to translate these interests and skills into occupational terms.

Three years later, Maria was pursuing an architecture certificate at a community college, reconnecting with her family on new terms, and living satisfactorily on her own, while maintaining a few good, close friendships in her local community. Her depression lifted as she increased her life options in career and in relationships. She was no longer "subject" to assumed roles and rules.

The counselor did not follow the CPSS model in a linear, lockstep order but instead wove constructivist and developmental assessment and intervention throughout counseling. The CPSS dimensions "leaked into" others. For example, context, style, and stage came together in Maria's (a) awareness of (and change in) her previously internalized ethnic, class, and family rules (context), which increased her (b) sense of identity (phase), which can be partially attributed to her (c) growing appreciation of her artistic and enterprises tendencies (style), all of which enhanced her capacity to self-author (stage).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Constructivist-developmental assessment in general and the CPSS model in particular might be part of the road map for beginning a new century in counseling. It is the task of counselors to apply these principles to their work. It is hoped that this umbrella for constructive developmental human understanding will spur efforts to create and test methods for a wellness-oriented developmental counseling. Thus together, counselors and counselor educators can further ground the work of such pioneers as Bloch (1982), D'Andrea (1988), Ivey (1991), and Kneefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1979). Only through such an evolution will the counseling field remain a leader among the helping fields in promoting active social responsibility, individual development, and strength enhancement for all populations. The CPSS model is perhaps a step in that direction.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

WORKSHEET FOR CONSTRUCTIVIST-DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT
The CPSS Model: Assessing Client Context, Phase, Stage, and Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Name:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**CONTEXT = “Where”**
- Situation (urgency, external barriers, similar past experiences):
- Family: stage, support/dissonance, enmeshment/distance, etc.
- Community/Culture (pertinent characteristics of client’s cultural identity: gender, ability, race, religion, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, etc.):
- Counselor’s own situation, family, community/culture as it affects this case.

**PHASE = “When”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Phase</th>
<th>Recurring of Previous Life-Phase Issue(s)</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Intervention(s) (Individual &amp; Network)</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STAGE = “How”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General C.D. Stage (from Integrated Theory)</th>
<th>Specific C.D. Theory Stage (e.g., from Kegan, BCT)</th>
<th>Do to match:</th>
<th>Do to mismatch:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselor’s own preferred meaning-making orientation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STYLE = “What”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MBTI Type</th>
<th>Career</th>
<th>Personality Style/Disorder (modeling role)</th>
<th>Core Values/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantage of this style. Plan to manage style:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS** (e.g., physical health, temperament, maladaptive thinking, self-efficacy issues, psychodynamic possibilities):