The primary question addressed in this article is whether and how career theories can be more culturally sensitive without losing value as conceptual explanations or their usefulness for counselors. Contextual action theory is identified as a means to develop culturally sensitive explanations. Six steps are proposed and illustrated, including using the naive observations and subjective reports and recognizing ongoing processes. The use of these steps in counseling is also addressed.

Counselors are faced with how to deal with clients’ culturally based career issues within the defined space of particular social representations, daily practices, political ideologies, and legal systems. Many career theories have developed either without explicit attention to these particular spaces and contexts or by presuming that theories developed in one context are applicable to other contexts. Nevertheless, career theories have been applied in a variety of contexts. The primary question addressed in this article is whether career theories and explanations can be more culturally sensitive in order to reflect specific contexts. To address this question, we begin by describing a specific cultural context and issue, that is, the family as a locus of career development for Aboriginal youth in Canada who reside in cities (Marshall, Young, & Brokenleg, 2003). Later, we use it as a case illustration in developing culturally sensitive career theories.

Many Aboriginal youth (self-identified First Nations, Inuit, or Métis) who live in Canadian cities face particularly difficult situations represented by a high dropout rate among students, unemployment (Statistics Canada, 2002, 2003), family poverty (Statistics Canada, 2002), substance abuse, involvement with the justice system (Clatworthy & Mendelson, 1999), and other problems of urban youth generally. Many of these young people

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and their families contend with the effects of the residential school system in Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Bull, 1991; Haig Brown, 1988; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Among other practices, residential schools over several generations separated children from their parents and separated parents from the school (Haig Brown, 1988; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Compounded by a degree of embedded racism and physical and sexual abuse, the effect of the residential school system for many Aboriginal people in the current generation is a “disconnect” between parenting, schooling, and the process of becoming adults for young people (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Although not all Aboriginal people attended residential schools and some experienced these schools positively, this disconnect has been further exacerbated for some Aboriginal children and youth attending schools that do not hold interest for them (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Although these issues do not reflect the cultural strengths of this community, they are issues faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada and stand as an example of many localized, culturally specific concerns that challenge counselors. Can career development theories assist us as counselors in understanding and addressing these types of particular problems? If career theories and the interventions that flow from them are to be meaningful and used by counselors, they have to be able to reflect the complexity and specificity of cultural environments.

The broader issue of whether career theories can be more culturally sensitive arises in the context of increased cultural contact between peoples, the rise of multiculturalism within national groups, the growth of globalization as an economic and political force, and dissatisfaction with approaches to career development that do not explicitly address culture. In responding to the challenges counselors and researchers face in making career theories more culturally sensitive, we introduce the contextual explanation of career (Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002) as culturally responsive and propose six steps that emerge from this approach that can serve to make explanations and theories about career more culturally sensitive and relevant. Finally, we illustrate how these steps can be used in addressing the case described at the beginning of this article and suggest how counselors might apply these steps in their own counseling.

One might ask why career theories are important at all and whether they can be culturally sensitive. Under ideal conditions, they serve as a kind of organizing template for counselors. They are helpful because they reduce a complex range of behaviors to usable explanations, constructs, relationships, and, to some extent, predictions. In reality, however, the career theories that are used by counselors are often an amalgam of more formal theories and practical everyday explanations born from the application of personal experience-generated knowledge to the problems of clients’ lives. These explanations are rooted in everyday thinking and reflect the daily lives of their clients. Some of these explanations are probably culturally sensitive, but few are culturally explicit. These tacit or “theories-at-hand” are heuristic explanations that are localized and particular and, to that extent, are useful to counselors. At the same time, however, counselors and clients may not have ready access to the explanations that guide their
action, may be constrained by explanations that do not work well when translated to action, or may not be responsive in different cultural contexts. Nevertheless, understanding theory as a heuristic that both counselors and laypeople use in their everyday lives is a starting point for moving toward more culturally sensitive theories at the formal level. It is also important in reducing the theory–practice gap.

The attempt to make career theory more culturally sensitive hinges on distinguishing between grand theories (or metanarratives, to use the language of the postmodernists) that have a universalist perspective and the localized, particular theory or narrative that is culturally responsive. It is relatively easy to aspire to developing localized, particular theories. The challenge is to bring forward what is common across cultures in a way that localized, particular theories have meaning beyond their immediate setting.

The Challenges of Cultural Diversity for Career Theories

The challenges to accommodate to greater cultural diversity in career theories come primarily from within the theories themselves. These include how culture is understood in career theories as well as their cultural boundedness, the epistemological paradigms in which career theories are embedded, and the focus on the individual. The challenges are part of, and surrounded by, the predominant socioeconomic and political discourse of this era, globalization.

Culture in Career Theories

We recognize that a range of theories has grown up in the career field. Some theories have strong psychometric roots (e.g., Holland, 1997), others are broadly based in developmental psychology (e.g., Super, 1957), and still others have arisen in the counseling field (e.g., Cochran, 1997). Savickas (2002) classified the approaches to career theories as focusing on dispositions, concerns, narrative, or process. Although culture is implicitly addressed in the concerns and narrative classifications, it is not a significant explicit theme in any of the four groups. The inattention to culture in theories of career might be a by-product of the tendency of universalistic principles to allocate resources based on achievement rather than ascription of given or inherited traits.

Notwithstanding significant efforts to address diversity in the career field (e.g., Fouad & Bingham, 1995; Leong & Brown, 1995), recently, Stead (2004) critiqued most extant career theories for their extreme ethnocentric view. He also criticized efforts to accommodate existing theories to other cultures by adding cultural concepts and models (e.g., Leong & Serafica, 2001). He suggested that theoretical concepts in the career domain have to have meaning and salience in the particular cultures in which they are developed. In other words, from the outset, culturally sensitive theories should be based on the recognition of particular cultures and their artifacts.

Epistemological Paradigms

Efforts to make career theories more culturally sensitive are further confounded by their different epistemological paradigms. Savickas’s
(2002) groupings contain positivist, postpositivist, and constructivist paradigms. As Stead (2004) pointed out, theories that represent positivist or postpositivist epistemological paradigms see culture largely as a nuisance variable and in effect try to control for it in an effort to produce "universal" knowledge.

The Cultural Boundedness of "Career"

Young and Collin (2000) have argued that career is a very flexible construct. Even within English-speaking, Western industrialized countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the word career has a range of meanings. They have also shown that the meaning of career changes as the occupational structure of society changes. For example, the bureaucratic meaning associated with career in the past is less the case today when a range of different work patterns are recognized.

In addition, theories in the social sciences, if not beyond, represent the ways in which knowledge is socially organized, produced, reproduced, and used. Career theories represent the way in which we counselors and researchers have socially organized knowledge in this field. Notwithstanding the significant cultural construction of career and of theories, culture is rarely made explicit in the discussion of career theories. For example, Stead (2004) argued that career theories are cultural constructions that make only occasional reference to cultural issues. He pointed out that they "seldom demonstrate in-depth how cultural issues play a role in career choice and career decision-making" (p. 397).

The Focus on the Individual

The search for more culturally sensitive career theories is also challenged by the highly individualistic orientation of much of career development research and practice. The field has been largely oriented toward the individual person knowing himself or herself, developing appropriate skills and interests, making a decision, and adjusting to work and occupation. Rooting occupational choice in personality and interest factors, as counselors and researchers do in the trait–factor approach, may actually serve as a means of protecting or isolating the individual from the culture. One may ask whether the implicit message of the trait–factor approach prevents individuals from engaging at the cultural level when making a career decision.

Globalization

The issue of globalization further thwarts the search for culturally sensitive career theories. Globalization refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows (International Monetary Fund, 2000). It has broad cultural, political, and environmental dimensions, including the harmonization of work modalities and expectations across national boundaries. Globalization is the new public discourse and metanarrative. As such, it represents both a challenge and an opportunity to the career field. The challenge is that globalization is such a significant factor in cultural homogenization that efforts in the career development field may be toward identifying more cultural commonalities than differences across career theories.
At the same time, by virtue of the extension of occupations, work, and, by implication, careers across these boundaries, globalization suggests greater need for an awareness of cultural differences and uniqueness, as well as the unpacking of presumed differences. This is the significant opportunity for greater cultural sensitivity in the career field, that is, that circulation, mobility, and diversity provide the conditions for the local, subjective, and particular theory. Thus, globalization in terms of its impact on career theories can be seen as a factor that simultaneously highlights career development issues in many cultures and pushes counselors toward recognizing greater cultural diversity in career theory.

**Toward More Culturally Sensitive Career Theories**

What follows, then, is an attempt to offer a position in which we meet both requirements, that is, one in which career theories are able to capture, reflect, and be sensitive to culture and, at the same time, be able to speak broadly across cultures. If we can address this goal successfully, we should be able to develop conceptual explanations that have value at more than the local level. Although we situate this position within the contextual explanation of career theory that has been described elsewhere (Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996; Young et al., 2002), the actual steps to more culturally sensitive theories can be applied more broadly to other theories and practices as well.

**Contextual Approach to Career**

The contextual explanation of career is based on the notion that the common experience of people across cultures is that one’s own and other people’s actions are understood as goal directed (Young et al., 1996, 2002). This framework for how people understand and make sense of human behavior looks to the goals of action rather than the causes of behavior for understanding. It posits a significant link between action, project, and career. Action is understood as a specific set of behaviors that has a common goal and occurs at a particular time. When several discrete actions that occur over a midlength period of time are constructed as having common goals, they are considered a project. Finally, when projects coalesce over a long period of time and have a significant place in one’s life, then it is possible to speak of career. It is important to note that we consider the occurrence of joint actions and projects as the common case.

Our view is that what people do in their daily lives is core to career. These actions provide an important link to culture. As Boesch (1991) pointed out, cultures emerge from complex processes of construction in which the goal is to place the individual “within a world that appears to be ordered, ‘transparent’, providing the space and the rules for action” (p. 362). Thus, action relates the individual to his or her culture. One can extend the relationship between action and culture to career. Career, through actions and projects over the long term, allows one to relate to the complexity of environments in which individuals participate over time, that is, one’s culture or cultures. It is through career that one can engage more fully with culture, and it is culture that allows one to engage in career. This is a complex interaction given that both career and culture are high-order constructs. Yet culture
represents more than individual beliefs and opportunities and career more than either action or project.

Once one decides to focus on action as a kind of basic unit of analysis and observation, it soon becomes obvious that what is of more critical interest and value are complex collections and sequences of actions that can be considered as projects and careers.

**Steps Toward Culturally Sensitive Career Theories**

We can now propose six steps to developing local and particular theories that are culturally sensitive. It does not entail beginning with current career theories and working to make them more culturally sensitive, nor will one career theory emerge from this proposed procedure but any number of theories that fit local contexts. At the same time, if we follow the framework of action theory, these local theories should have the common language and epistemology of action that allows researchers and practitioners to speak to one another in meaningful ways.

_Understanding culture._ To lead counselors to more culturally sensitive career theories, one must begin with understanding culture as more than a nuisance variable. There is a range of definitions that fit with understanding culture in this broad sense. For example, Stead (2004) described culture as “a social system of shared symbols, meanings, perspectives, and social actions that are mutually negotiated by people in their relationships with others” (p. 392). Ratner (2002) explained culture as “a system of enduring behavioural and thinking patterns that are created, adopted, and promulgated by a number of individuals jointly” (p. 9). We have found Boesch’s (1991) definition particularly helpful in linking culture and action. He defined culture as “a field of action” (p. 29). In this definition, culture is seen as offering both possibilities and conditions for action. As Boesch stated, “as an action field, culture not only induces and controls action, but is also continuously transformed by it; therefore, culture is as much a process as a structure” (p. 29). These definitions also imply that culture can be understood as more than a reference to racial or ethnic groups or social address.

One may also be seduced into thinking of culture as a thing. In our view, culture is an ongoing intergenerational shared and joint process of actions, projects, and careers. Individuals participate in culture through their actions, projects, and career, which, in turn, serve to construct culture. It is important to remember that Boesch (1991) indicated that culture is a field of action, not a field for action; the former suggesting the fluid, dynamic, and process characteristics of culture. Culture is not the stage on which the counselor’s work takes place; it is part of his or her work. It is both perspectives through which counselors understand action and how actions coalesce to construct projects and careers that can lead career theories and counselors to be knowledgeable of culture and responsive to it.

_Establishing links between career and culture._ In developing career theories that are more culturally sensitive, a second step is to establish the link between culture and career. Action links culture and career. In our contextual theory of career, we have suggested that career represents the way in which people organized actions across time to afford meaning and direction in their lives. Boesch (1991) provided a definition of culture in which action not only figures centrally but also is considered
as a complex of interrelated action fields. Career captures this complexity by constructing actions across time to create meaning for the individual. However, because of the complexity of the action fields involved, the construction of career includes social meaning as well.

**Beginning with narrative and folk explanations.** The third step is to recognize narrative and folk explanations of actions and sequences of actions. Bruner (1990) referred to “folk psychology” as “a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world” (p. 35). Narrative, he further suggested, is the process in which a folk psychology is elaborated and represented. To some extent, we have seen in the counseling and career literature that narrative itself has become an explanatory and intervention theory (e.g., Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1997). What is more salient is that some would consider the narrative framework itself as sufficient for career explanations and interventions. It is important, however, to unpack the nature of narrative and folk explanations not only to understand them more fully but also to see how they contribute to the cultural understanding of career.

What is important in understanding narrative and folk psychology data is that, although the content of narratives and explanations varies across cultures, it is generally held that as human beings, we attribute intention to agents, irrespective of content (Lillard, 1998). In essence, in narrative and folk explanations, actions are explained by reference to the intentions of the agent. Although this may be, with some variation, considered to be a universal, it is not sufficiently complex to account for the multifaceted nature of human actions, which are linked over time and have complex goal structures. Nevertheless, the attribution of intention is a critical step in understanding goal-directed actions (that eventually become a career; Richardson, 2004). There are a number of other characteristics of a folk psychology of action (e.g., perception and interpretation) that have been empirically verified, which also serve as beginning points. However, these characteristics are not fully specified for the local situation to form full theories of career.

**Using naive observations in local communities.** Ethnography has been identified as the major anthropological method for doing research in other cultures (e.g., Lillard, 1998). Observation and participation in culture and cultural groups are the primary ways that ethnography is done. It also involves asking people for further explanations of what is observed.

Our view is that the observation of actions is a critical step to describing and formulating theories about actions and careers in given cultures. However, ethnographic observation has been criticized for already being filtered by the theoretical and cultural lens of the researcher. We have attempted to address this by collecting participants’ “actions” on videotape. Subsequently, we replayed the videotape and asked the participants the meaning the actions had for them. This procedure is an effort to uncover the intentions of the participants; to be able to describe actions...
and projects; and, ultimately (with the other steps), to generate culturally specific explanations. While recounting intentions, participants describe the joint action in a culturally informed way, thus providing the naive observation. They tell us what is going on and how to understand it.

One of the important premises of the contextual action theory of career is that careers are constructed from different perspectives. These perspectives include the subjective view of the actors, the systematic approach of the professionals, and naive observation of others in the actor’s communication community. Several strategies and traditions in science are used to treat naive theories. Some of the traditional research derives an hypothesis from naive observation and everyday knowledge and then shows in an experiment that these everyday ideas are false. Other researchers maintain that everyday knowledge is the most important kind of knowledge and should be systematically collected in a way that is not distorted by rigorous methodology. In our view, naive observation provides one of the perspectives in constructing processes under scrutiny, that is, actions, projects, and processes of becoming (or career).

Naive observation is particularly important in dealing with long-term, socially embedded processes, such as becoming through a career. Possessing visible or audible features that are used for socially relevant attributions; displaying behaviors, actions, and strategies; or having certain events and actions in one’s biography might lead to an interpretation and construction of a career from the perspective of others that differs substantially from the goals of those whose career it is. The possible resulting incongruence is at the core of why career theories cannot be imposed by one cultural group on another without due consideration of naive observation and the other steps identified here. It is important to note that there might be substantial differences between narratives and an ongoing naive description.

**Recognizing ongoing processes.** The naive observation of actions in local communities is the basis for the subsequent step, which is the recognition and identification of the ongoing processes of which these actions are a part. In other words, projects are constructed from actions, and actions are unfolded within projects in which larger and larger social networks participate. For example, in our work, we recognize that the parent–adolescent construction of the adolescent’s future (career) is not a stand-alone event. We have found that it is an ongoing process that has a complex goal structure, which includes career-related actions (Young et al., 2001). At this stage, there has to be an acknowledgment that these actions are not stand alone but, indeed, are part of a longer series of actions involving complex goal structures.

**Subject naive observations and reports of ongoing processes to systematic analysis.** Once we as counselors identify a need to move beyond folk explanations of career, then we are required to submit our naive observations and reports of actions and ongoing processes to systemic analysis. Systematic and rigorous analysis shifts the basis for theory building from only participant-based narrative descriptions to sophisticated and detailed descriptions of action and projects consistent with conceptualizations and evidence. This step is coherent with the conceptual framework that is addressed in action theory. We have described this process as a hermeneutic between the data (i.e., our own and participant observations and reports) and the framework of intentional, goal-directed action, which
arises from the folk explanations and empirical data based on narrative and meaning making (Young et al., 2001).

Case Example

Further to the case we introduced at the beginning of this article, we are attempting to identify and describe the projects of urban-residing Aboriginal youth that contribute to their futures (careers) and those individuals with whom these projects are constructed. We propose that in developing an explanation of this phenomenon, we (Marshall et al., 2003) can use the steps outlined earlier.

First, our understanding of culture is fluid and dynamic, and is localized, not to all Aboriginal people, but particularly to Aboriginal youth and their families in Canadian cities (in effect, it is more localized than that, because we are focusing on only one neighborhood in one Canadian city). We see this “culture” as the field of action, which includes trying to identify and describe its “possibilities”; that is, what the field offers the person. Appreciating culture as a dynamic and fluid notion enables us to observe how families negotiate their history of the past and look forward to the future. For example, among parents who experienced disruption of their own families through residential schools or foster care, we have observed efforts to learn various parenting skills to use with their own children. One mother described reading extensively, attending courses, and selectively adopting parenting strategies she believes fit with her values. Thus, this parent’s interactions with her child are purposefully distinct from those of the previous generation.

Second, we expected that we would not be able to come to any valid understanding of career for this group without situating it within culture. Whatever one considers career to be, it is not a construct that can be imposed on a culture. It actually arises within the culture and is closely connected with how meaning is constructed across time. In our work with urban-residing Aboriginal youth, we began with the notion of “family career development projects in urban Aboriginal families” but have chosen not to use the word career explicitly because these families do not use it routinely as an everyday term for their own occupational processes. We do not assume that career is a construct used in, or useful to, all cultures. Rather, we have chosen more open terms, growing into adults or becoming adults, which we hope resonate with the experiences of these young people and their families. Nevertheless, our focus is on the actions of families as they construct projects about the future with young people. Thus far, the growing into adults projects involve not only the pursuit of education but also concurrent concerns, such as learning the value of caring for others. The latter project is a good example of how career projects are much more than the transition to work and the continuity of that work. In this case, citizenship and care for the larger community are also key components of growing up because these characteristics ensure the continuity of the culture. By using a culturally appropriate term, we are able to observe the ways in which career is embedded into the larger social context of the urban Aboriginal community.

Third, our effort is to be open to the action and experience of these Aboriginal youth and their families. Yet we approach them with a conceptualization that they themselves use, that is, action is socially
constructed and explained as intentional and goal directed. There is substantial ethnographic evidence from the narratives of Aboriginal people that reflects an understanding of intentionality and goal-directedness of action. For example, the narratives of First Nations women who have described overcoming suicidal ideation and attempts while they were adolescents reflect actions that are understood as intentional and goal directed (Paproski, 1997). Similarly, Cheshire's (2001) description of the goal-directed, joint action of U.S. urban Aboriginal mothers and their children is explicit in detailing practices that intentionally transmit cultural values (in the language of action theory, we would call this a cultural project). Our observations thus far suggest very intentional, goal-directed processes that emerge in very subtle ways. For example, the parents tend to use nondirective strategies with their adolescent children and the adolescent response is to be respectful. Parents' nondirective strategies include asking questions of their adolescents for the purpose of nudging the adolescents to think about their actions. The parents' use of questions is quite planful, as evidenced in their comments about their actions.

Fourth, we use naive observations in local communities. Whereas in previous studies we have looked specifically at the parent–adolescent dyad as the locus of action (and family projects) relative to the adolescent's future (Young et al., 2001; Young et al., 2003), in this case, we have identified the “talking circle” as a possible focus of observation. The talking circle is a group of people identified by the youth and his or her parents as being helpful to the adolescent to become an adult. The talking circle is quite consistent with Aboriginal traditions in Canada. In the case of this work, the use of the talking circle represents our effort to identify a salient group with which the growing into adults project is constructed for some adolescents.

Fifth, we also recognize that the growing into adults project is not limited to a particular time frame. This project occurs over time. Our intention is to monitor aspects of it, for example, the specifics of the actions and projects between the youth and the most salient adult in his or her life. By monitoring the projects over time, we have been able to observe the responsiveness and flexibility of families as events occur in their lives. Their responses to change suggest resilience in negotiating difficult circumstances that intrude upon their projects.

Sixth, we count on feedback from the participants about the actions that have contributed to these growing into adults projects. However, we also analyze their actions using the systematic procedures that we have developed to understand career-related action and projects in families. We also consult with the local Aboriginal community regarding preliminary findings. We expect that the emerging, local, and particular career theory is more than the actions or projects themselves or the participants' narratives of them.

Our intention is to be able to describe these growing into adults projects of urban-residing Aboriginal adolescent youth. It is hoped that this description will contribute to the narrative or localized, particular explanation of how these youth become adults. As well as developing a sophisticated understanding of this phenomenon, we hope that the process we have outlined will be both healing and transformative for those involved in it. It may be healing in undoing the implicit cultural imposition that Ab-
original people in Canada were subject to. It may be transformative as the participants become more aware of the way these projects are constructed and acted on within their own families or talking circles.

Implications for Counseling

We have proposed six steps that are directed toward making career theories more culturally sensitive. These steps can be used heuristically by practitioners as well as by researchers/theoreticians. Specifically, in cross-cultural and multicultural contexts, counselors may abandon traditional theories and work on the basis of implicit theories, presumptions, and generalizations about particular ethnic or cultural groups. They do not always have access to explanations when things work, or fail to work, in counseling. Knowing how to construct explanations that guide their actions as well as the actions of their clients lessens the theory–practice gap. The counselor’s use of these steps has a twofold purpose. They address explanations of both client and counselor actions in counseling in a kind of back-and-forth process. They can be used by counselors to explicate career and change processes that they engage in with clients from different ethnic or cultural groups. The steps address both counselor conceptualizations and procedures. Their thoughtful use will overcome the easy temptations that all explanations are equally useful or valid or that one explanation fits all situations.

First, it is contingent upon counselors to have an understanding not only of particular cultures but also of culture itself. The closer that understanding can be to culture as a dynamic, ongoing process, the more opportunity the counselor will have to engage directly in culture in the counseling process, rather than considering culture as a variable to be accommodated to. To what extent does the counselor see the joint action with the client as constructing the cultural and other projects of the client? An understanding of culture is not only needed when counselor–client cultural differences are suspected. Counseling is deeply embedded cultural work in all contexts.

Second, it is particularly important for counselors to appreciate the link between career and culture. Specifically, the question that every counselor and client face in some fashion is, “How does the client construct his or her past, present, and/or future actions across time to create meaning?” How clients create meaning across time is central to counseling. Although counselors may question whether the term career in its colloquial sense should be used in counseling people from some ethnic or cultural groups, creating meaning across time is essentially a career issue. When one considers the relationships of goal-directed actions and projects that contribute to career in the sense of constructing meaning over the long term, the place of culture becomes central and explicit in multicultural and cross-cultural contexts. The relationship between culture and career can be manifest in the client’s cultural projects and careers. For example, Young et al. (2003) found the cultural projects of immigrant Chinese Canadian families as “seeking a stable sense of sameness and continuity” (p. 299) with their past as well as realizing the bicultural aspects of their lives in Canada. In turn, these cultural projects were enacted in the career development activities the parents and adolescents engaged in together.
Third, beginning with the client’s story or narrative in counseling is common practice. Counselors recognize that these stories are critical for developing explanations of actions within and outside of counseling. As Besley (2002) pointed out, narratives in counseling provide clients the means to tell dominant cultural stories, position themselves in role-based stories, and construct distinctive narratives of identity. The telling of the story as well is critical to understanding, including appreciating the role of emotion and agency. In facilitating the telling and unpacking of narratives with clients, counselors can enable the client to understand how the narrative contributes to meaning, to meaning making across time, and to the individual and joint actions that contribute to the narrative. Counselors as well need to recognize that the counseling itself contributes to the development of narratives, which, in turn, can play a part in understanding action. Using narratives in counseling is not intended to make the client feel different, nor is it intended to be framed as a source of learning for the counselor (e.g., “I want to learn from you”). Pretending to be very competent or incompetent in a culture may detract from the counselor’s openness to the narratives the client provides.

Fourth, naive observation is also possible in counseling. One way is using video playback, which is a method familiar to counselors. What is added here is the conceptualization that the internal processes (i.e., thoughts and feelings) the client reports are what guide his or her actions. The method of video playback called the self-confrontation that we have used in our research and clinical work can be judiciously adapted for work with clients (e.g., Valach, Michel, Dey, & Young, 2002; Young, Valach, Dillabough, Dover, & Matthes, 1994). Specifically, clients can be asked to observe the video recording of counseling sessions and asked to recall their thoughts and feelings for successive short segments of the counseling session. This is naive observation. This procedure can equally be applied to clients in joint conversations with family members or other significant people in their lives.

Counselors are also able to provide naive observations of their “cultural” work using this procedure. Having counselors look at the video playback of sessions with clients engaged in nondominant cultural projects allows counselors to reflect on their naive observations and internal processes as they participate in the counselors’ culture.

Fifth, counselors are particularly adept at recognizing ongoing processes. Unlike some other career theories, contextual action theory (Young et al., 2002) provides a framework for understanding the relationship among ongoing processes in the short, middle, and long terms, identified specifically as action, project, and career. This includes how actions are related to a complex system of goals that are unfolded in a range of projects and careers. Understanding action does not end with adopting the proposed concept of culture, nor with unpacking narratives or facilitating naive observations. Ultimately, these steps have to lead to an understanding that the processes in which the client is engaged have relational, contextual, and constructionist underpinnings. Culturally sensitive counseling is not a search for variables that explain difficulties or differences. Rather, it is a search for the complex tapestry of, and the process of weaving, joint actions and projects as parts of different careers.
or "becomings" in which the counselor becomes a part through the counseling process. Another form of naive observation applicable in practice is asking members of certain communication communities to describe the target actions previously recorded on video.

Finally, at some point, counselors can apply some level of systematic analysis to the naive observations and narratives if greater access to explanations for actions is to be realized. Contextual action theory has a number of conceptual tools for such systematic analysis that are open to constructing local and specific explanations without losing either a common language or a grounding in everyday experience. These tools include examining action from the perspectives of manifest behavior, internal processes, and social meaning. It also provides a framework to examine specific action processes by delineating the relationships between goals, functional steps or means to the goals, and the detailed verbal and nonverbal elements that constitute an action. As in each of the preceding steps, using these tools invites coconstruction. Bringing systematic analyses back to clients is one way to do this; as narrative, naive observation and recognizing joint processes all engage the client in some way. Contextual action theory represents one systematic approach for examining action in counseling. Counselors may wish to use other approaches as well.

**Conclusion**

Bernal, Trimble, Burlew, and Leong (2003) challenged psychologists to develop constructs that reflect the complexity of culture and its relationship to psychological phenomena. This complexity is reflected in several different lines of work in the field of culture, counseling, and career development, including identifying specific counselor competencies for cross-cultural work (e.g., Sue, 2001), addressing structural factors that impede access to the world of work for certain groups (e.g., Kirby, 2002), examining career aspiration and other variables among particular ethnic groups (e.g., Flores & O'Brien, 2002), establishing the close link between counseling and career (e.g., Fouad & Bingham, 1995), and calling for social justice approaches in career counseling (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Peterson & González, 2005). These approaches to career counseling and development implicitly or explicitly encourage counselors to examine how culture reflects or does not reflect the career theories and explanations they use.

Such an examination can happen when counselors work through the steps proposed here. We have proposed a way in which culture is seen as central to career and in which career is composed of goal-directed, intentional action across time. The key to this process is to see the close connection between action and culture. It is also important to recognize that theories and explanations are not as separate from actual experience as many presume. Rather, we begin with the recognition that counseling is a practice discipline in which the action of the counselor and client are central. The action of counseling encapsulates culture and is the first source to consider in making career and counseling theories more culturally sensitive.

The framework we have described here provides a means for counselors to go beyond a general understanding of particular cultures. It recognizes that developing culturally sensitive career explanations is not something that can be accomplished entirely prior to the counseling
process itself. It allows the development of localized particular career theories that resonate with the culture in which they are embedded and speak meaningfully to an international audience of career researchers and practitioners.

References


