
Youth Work Transitions: A Review with Implications for Counselling and Career Practice

Transitions pour les jeunes au travail : Une revue et des implications pour le counseling et l'orientation professionnelle

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ABSTRACT

We critically review studies highlighting youth's work transitions and derive some implications for career and counselling theory and practice. We first discuss today's hypermodern world, specifically the meanings being conveyed by today's complex social realities and their impact on individuals' (work) lives. An overview of research, most of it framed from the perspective of current youth studies literature, follows, addressing how today's youth think, feel, and act while negotiating work transitions. Finally, some implications for career counselling theory and practice are derived, using some of the most recent developments in the career field theory as an integrative framework.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article procède à un examen critique des études mettant en évidence les transitions chez les jeunes au travail et en tire des implications pour l'orientation professionnelle et la théorie et la pratique du counseling. On commence par discuter le monde hypermoderne d'aujourd'hui, spécifiquement les significations véhiculées par ses complexes réalités sociales et leur impact sur la vie au travail des individus. Suit un aperçu de la recherche, pour la plupart à partir de la perspective de la littérature courante sur les études jeunesse qui abordent les manières de penser, de sentir, et d'agir des jeunes contemporains quand ils confrontent des transitions de travail. Finalement, des implications pour la théorie et la pratique du counseling de carrière sont dégagées dans le cadre de développements des plus récents dans la théorie du domaine de carrière.

As Young and Collin (2000) argued in *The Future of Career*, "from today's perspective, the future looks very different from the past and present" (p. 1). Much had changed in the years prior to the publication of their book in 2000, and many more changes were anticipated and took place in the years that followed. So much so that, in this day and age, to state the world has and continues to change has become rather matter of fact. It is undeniable that these transformations, many introduced by globalization processes and information technologies, have had and still have serious impacts on work and career. The new types of

work organization and relationships that emerged, especially in the last two to three decades, have had profound impacts on individuals, groups, institutions, and society. Thus, both these changes and their impacts were “critically important to career” (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 2). Nonetheless, as Young and Collin asserted, and in spite of the ongoing debates about its usefulness and significance, *career* continues to be an essential construct for understanding how individuals engage themselves with society’s organizational structures, namely work and work-related institutions. Career also allows people to “attribute coherence, continuity, and social meaning to their lives” and, because it usually involves a “representation or construction of actions and events, and in some instances, the self, across time” (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 1), it allows people to envision what their future might be or become.

Despite their firm belief in the meaning and value of the career construct, Collin and Young (2000) acknowledged the need for a change in our common understanding of the concept so that it can better encompass the current diversity of individuals’ life, work, and education experiences. It is hard, if not impossible, in Western industrialized societies to disentangle the notion of career from those of work, employment, occupations, or jobs. As the authors argued, it is also hard to “overestimate the centrality of work in human life and society” (p. 5), even in the context that for many people employment is more scarce and less predictable. Hence, it comes as no surprise that a growing number of authors, including Richardson (2009), have described the times we live in as “exciting and challenging” (p. 76) for all those working in the fields of vocational psychology and guidance. Much in line with what Collin and Young (2000) hold and, for instance, Savickas (e.g., 2000, 2011) has long argued, Richardson (2009) advocated for an overall change in the rather traditional way in which many theorists, researchers, and practitioners in the career field still address a person’s vocational needs. Only through such a change can we better articulate the work being done in the career area within the context of today’s highly complex and differentiated social realities and the demands they impose on individuals in the occupational, educational, and training spheres of life.

Concurrent with the view just described is the production of an extensive body of research on current youth transitions, most of it framed from the perspective of youth studies literature. Using findings from this body of research, in this article we provide insights on some young people’s priorities and subjectivities concerning work transitions. For the purposes of our review, we do not present findings pertaining to preceding generations or rely on comparative studies. Also, we do not detail changes in other areas of life, such as relationships and housing, unless directly related to the experiences and meanings youth attach to work and career. In addition, it is not our intention to address how a number of traditional social structures, such as class, gender, or geographic location, persist in affecting young people’s identities and meanings. Thus, it is our aim to review, from a critical standpoint, findings that highlight some of the meanings and experiences underlying the ways in which today’s youth think, feel, and act while negotiating

work or employment-related transitions and experiences. We also aim to draw some implications for career and counselling theory and practice. To do so, we first present some of the main features of today's world. We then offer an overview of the research focusing on youth transitions to work. Finally, we discuss some of the most recent developments in the career field theory and use them as an integrative framework for discussing these studies and their implications for career and counselling.

THE WORLD TODAY: SOME ONGOING CHANGES AND IDENTIFIABLE TRENDS

Today's societal culture is ruled by a semantic constellation of terms embodying the "*zeitgeist* of Western contemporary societies" (Coimbra, 2005, p. 3). Expressions such as uncertainty, fragmentation, instability, destandardization, insecurity, nonlinearity, risk, unpredictability, turbulence, and precariousness have for some time now mirrored the current social construction of what people can expect from their daily lives and experiences. As Coimbra (2005) argued, this semantic constellation structures many of the main social, political, and economic features underlying today's grand societal narratives. Furthermore, its pervasiveness weakens individuals' ability to construe the world they live in as safe and predictable. Many experience a feeling of perceived impotence over their ability to exert control over life situations. According to Bauman (2001), people begin to perceive the future as a threat, due to an overpowering feeling that things, especially those that matter the most, are less predictable, hence somewhat uncontrollable. They also are compelled to make a complex multiplicity of choices about what they wish to become, due to a generalized realization that one's place in society "no longer comes as a (wanted or unwanted) gift" (Bauman, 2001, p. 144).

Furthermore, as Bauman (2001) maintained, the amount and nature of support and the normative guidelines offered by most of society's long-established institutions—for example, family and school—are lessening. This weakening of the support and structure offered by many traditional social institutions happens mostly because of what Bauman describes as the "inherently dynamic aspects of modernity—the continuous 'new beginning' and 'creative destruction' as a way of life" (p. 67). The fluidity and volatility of such opposing processes and tensions only facilitates the growing erosion of a number of socially inferred assumptions or expectations (Coimbra & Menezes, 2009). These range from the right to work and access to social benefits to one's protection in health, unemployment, or retirement. In other words, many people in contemporary societies find themselves in rather difficult situations. On the one hand, they must deal with a societal culture in which they are embedded with a sense of personal responsibility for their success or failure in life's various domains (e.g., being able to find or maintain a job). On the other hand, due to the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of the processes at the heart of present social systems and organizations, that same culture does not always make explicit the lack of control they have over contextual conditions that, in turn, constrain action and, thus, the course of their lives (e.g., the circumstances

around and resulting from the economic crisis that in recent years has led to a growth in unemployment in most Western countries).

As Beck (1992) put it, nowadays “how one lives becomes the *biographical solution of systemic contradictions*” (p. 137). The unfolding of individual biographies cannot be dissociated from the way in which people manage to integrate and overcome the apparent fragmentations and inconsistencies that prevail within and among the institutionalized systems they live in (e.g., family, education, employment, consumption). This circumstance is aggravated by a widespread atmosphere of mistrust of oneself, others, and institutions. As Marris (1996) argued, competition overcomes collaboration when institutions become uncertain, restrictive, and devoid of common features facilitating the development of positive, nurturing bonds between individuals and the social organizations in which they live. Under such conditions, individuals embark in what Marris called a *competitive management of uncertainty*. They struggle to maintain a sense of agency and power, even if this means undermining others’ sense of autonomy of control.

If indeed, as Bauman (2001) suggested, all societies are more than mere “factories of meaning,” functioning rather as “nurseries of meaningful life” (p. 2), a state of affairs such as the current one cannot help but have as its outcome the fading of the major utopias together with individuals’ immense disorientation (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2008). Hence, a growing number of people will find it harder to coherently construct a minimally consistent understanding of their daily life worlds, that is, to answer such essential questions as *Who am I?* or *Where do I belong?*

The Hypermodern (Work) World

Castells (1996) portrayed today’s new kind of social organizations as a *network of multiple accesses*. Some of the main features of this network concern its intense dynamism, openness, ability to innovate, and a more or less complete absence of menaces to its (enduring but, simultaneously, ever-changing) balance. Illustrative of this systemic functioning is the way in which financial markets all over the world operate. These global markets run at all times via a string of virtual flows capable, at any given moment, of influencing what is going on anywhere in the world. The same applies to the corporate level, in particular to multinational companies. Another example is the use one makes of the Internet in one’s own personal time, for instance, web searches, conversations in chat rooms, Skyping, and emailing. Globalization and the new information and communication technologies make possible the affirmation of a nonstop virtual connected world. Due to these ongoing, palpable processes of dispersion and fragmentation, time and space no longer constitute neutral, homogeneous, and linear entities.

In the meantime, a new type of capitalism appeared, one that Lipovetsky and Serroy (2008) characterize as *hypercapitalism*, and asserted itself as one of the structuring principles of today’s *hypermodern* world (the other principles identified by the authors are *hypertechnicism*, *hyperindividualism*, and *hyperconsumerism*). With the rise of hypercapitalism came the affirmation of a new type of economy favouring a gradual disengagement between capital and labour—that is, the establishment

of an accumulation model easing capital's freedom of movement to a degree "undreamt in the past" (Bauman, 2001, p. 25). Such a level of fluidity and intangibility relies heavily on an economic capitalist system devoted almost exclusively to the never-ending stimulation of demand, incessant commodization, and nonstop multiplication of human needs. Ideas, concepts, and brands grow in importance while the opposite happens with the production and accumulation of material objects. This process is most obvious in the ongoing transition from an industry-dominated to a services-dominated employment structure. For the last two to three decades, the workforce employed in the services area has not stopped growing. At the beginning of the year 2000, about three quarters of the OECD countries' workforce was working in services (D'Agostini, Serafini, & Ward-Warmedinger, 2006). Even today, despite the current economic crisis, some areas of economic activity devoted to the rendering of services and the offering of experiences (e.g., in the green economy, the health-care sector, and the information and technology sectors) kept on and are expected to keep on producing new job opportunities. In parallel, manufacturing jobs are facing a standstill (International Labour Organization, 2013).

The spreading of all the identified structural changes have had a decisive impact in the work world, particularly in what concerns its successive decentralization and disaggregation (Castells, 1996). Such transformations originate from and underlie the growing flexibility and deregulation of work conditions and relationships. They have helped to expand the numbers of those having to deal with less predictable, more vulnerable situations in which employment is no longer perceived as a right but as a privilege, for example, among the unemployed and those working on contract or without benefits. These changes not only led to a decrease in workers' job security but also echoed a risk dislocation from the employer to the employee or those seeking a job, thus giving rise to a *feminization of individual transition biographies* in the career domain (Chisholm, 1999). According to Chisholm, more polarized life chances and a new balance between formal and nonformal credentials are the most likely outcomes of ongoing changes in youth education and work transitions. As a consequence, there will be an increase in the number of young men and young women experiencing nonlinear transitions with poor exchange values in the labour market.

As Sennett (1998) suggested, under circumstances such as the ones depicted, people are faced with the need to manage a zigzagging career path exponentially more unsure and anguishing than previously. People also have to deal with new types of power—unequal and arbitrary, concentrated without being centralized. According to Sennett, the generalization of this risk culture helps to understand why neither long-term goals nor decisions are being taken by people. It also helps to understand why the ability to adapt and deal with challenges is deemed a priority in relation to experience and skills. In other words, why people must learn to live and creatively react or adapt to a boundarylessness in the work world. This work world is simultaneously global and local in how it operates (that is, *glocal*). It is a work world dominated by multinational companies, consumerism, and cyberspace where, for instance, financial markets operate. All of the foregoing con-

tributes to an over-commitment to the present or short term and the concomitant devaluation of an endemically uncertain future.

In sum, individuals nowadays construct themselves and their realities in the context of a profound social change. The world we live in, as Bauman (2001) suggested, no longer provides individuals a sense of security and support, which would allow them to understand life events and circumstances as somewhat predictable or controllable. This loss of a sense of security and support is undeniable when it comes to people's experience of the rather unstable ways in which the world of work operates in contemporary Western societies. Changes introduced by globalization and the information and communication technologies, as well as the affirmation of an unprecedented, extreme type of capitalism—hypercapitalism, as Lipovsky and Serroy (2008) call it—lead to an overwhelming feeling of impotence and the need for people to creatively adapt and adjust to new types of work and career.

YOUTH TRANSITIONS TO WORK: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

Like most other areas of contemporary life, youth transitions went through a process of increased diversification and destandardization. Within the field of youth studies, there is generalized agreement about the notion that a number of distinctive features exist between the lives of today's youth and the lives of the "baby boomers who grew to adulthood in the 1950s and 1960s" (Roberts, 2007, p. 265). According to Roberts (2007), it is undisputable that today's youth "is certainly different" (p. 266) from preceding generations. The post-1970 cohorts of young people living in Western countries grew up "in new times," not knowing anything other than "post-industrial, post-Fordist economies, and global neoliberalism" (p. 267). In other words, young people of today are confronted with historic, political, and material conditions that, to some extent and in many ways, are very different to the ones offered to previous cohorts or generations. As a consequence, "enduring changes" (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, p. 500) have been identified in the ways in which today's youth approach and live their lives. Furthermore, due to the specific set of economic, social, cultural, historic, and political conditions in which current youth transitions occur, the latter have become not only substantially lengthier but also more plural, and less predictable or linear.

According to Pais (2001), many young people of today perceive their lives as being in constant fluctuation and progressing very much like the somewhat erratic balancing of a yo-yo. Roberts (1997) described them as "navigators who negotiate opportunities and risks" (p. 58), and whose movement through life often subverts the former orderly and prescribed advancement through one's tasks and roles. In fact, as emphasized by Wyn and Woodman (2006), there is "considerable convergence of evidence" allowing us to assume that similarities identified in contemporary youth's "new life patterns" most likely "constitute a generational shift" (p. 496). Perhaps, as Wyn and Woodman suggested, a new way of life is being forged, in which those belonging to the post-1970 generation constitute a vanguard cohort (Wyn, 2004). Although theirs is not a consensual point of view (see Roberts,

2007), Wyn and Woodman (2006) advocated that young people born from the 1970s onwards “represent a clear break” (p. 501) with their parents’ generation.

According to Wyn and Woodman (2006), significant shifts in life patterns can be identified in major arenas, such as education, employment, relationships, household formation, or consumption, and cannot simply be attributed to “age effects” (Wyn & Woodman, 2007, p. 373). As mentioned before, this does not necessarily mean that traditional structural dimensions promoting inequalities, such as class, gender, ethnicity, or geographic location, do not persist or that their influence is less significant. Also, it does not necessarily mean that what is valued by the post-1970 generation differs from what youth belonging to the baby boomer generation valued. As a consequence, we cannot infer or assume that all youth’s transitions or their priorities, in particular work or employment-related transitions and priorities, are different from what they were for previous generations or age cohorts. As Wyn and Woodman (2007) stressed, what we can rely upon is that, for the most part, young people of today seem to be experiencing these transitions in new or different ways. The (new) ways in which they approach life’s multiple areas of commitment, in particular education and employment, is nothing but an indication of how young people are making sense of their lives—that is, of their changed subjectivities and priorities underlying the also different transition pathways under construction.

According to Wyn and Woodman (2007), the “shift we point to is one of *meaning*” (p. 377), and mostly concerns the youth of today’s distinctive subjectivities, life patterns, and priorities in how they experience transitions to adulthood and adulthood in itself, specifically in the work domain. In sum, it is a shift that “highlights the ways in which new and distinctive meanings and expressions are forged in relation to continuities with older patterns of life” (p. 380). Nonetheless, most institutions traditionally responsible for supporting youth through their transitions, for example, in the education, training, or employment domains, still operate and respond to today’s flexible and rather unpredictable life conditions according to somewhat “outdated assumptions” (Roberts, 2007, p. 266). These assumptions tend to assume rather normative or prescriptive views on how today’s youth’s lives should unfold, namely in the education or work domains, often equating or measuring them against baby boomers’ life experiences and transitions (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Thus, they do not sufficiently consider the contemporary layers of multidimensionality underlying young people’s current life experiences and (work) transitions (Walther, Stauber, & Pohl, 2005).

Young people—that is, those living the transition to adulthood—experience a period of their lives in which major choices and decisions, particularly in the career domain, are considered and often implemented (Young et al., 2011). Over the past century, this transitional period has been successively elongated, more complex, and less predictable. As defined by Young and colleagues (2011), this is a rather prolonged period of time, covering nearly two decades of people’s lives: the second and part of the third decades. In other words, it has its onset at the end of childhood and is extended across adolescence. Others have made these age limits somewhat more flexible, moving them forward to the mid-30s (Parada,

2007). This option echoed some trends in the school-to-work transition literature, introducing 34 as the maximum age limit for the movement from education and training to employment. However, others have taken a more radical stance on the subject, not stipulating any age limits at all. For example, du Bois-Reymond (1998) declared that no age limits defining the beginning of adulthood can be asserted, given the complex interplay existing between “objective circumstances and subjective definitions of life” (p. 65).

In sum, today’s youth’s transitions to adulthood, thus to the world of work, have become more gradual, complex, and less uniform than those experienced by their parents’ generation, the baby boomers. Although no general, clearcut assumptions can be made about the nature and content of these transitions, one thing we can assume is that young people of today seem to exhibit somewhat specific meanings and priorities and life patterns (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, 2007). These life patterns mirror how young people are making sense of their lives, in particular of their work transitions, within changed social circumstances. The extent to which these shifts in young people’s meanings and experiences are apparent in youth work transitions is precisely what the following literature review intends on helping to understand. This review, mostly of current youth studies research, does not pretend to convey a global, in-depth portrait of the post-1970 generation. As Roberts (2007) stated, most available studies “comprised cross-sectional snapshots” (p. 264). Thus, our aim is simply to highlight a number of trends in findings that, from our perspective, point to subjectivities, life patterns, and priorities in the ways in which today’s youth deal with career and work-related transitions.

Hedonism and Expressiveness in Contemporary Youth (Work) Lives

As Pais, Cairns, and Pappámikail (2005) noted, for the past few years a growing number of studies have pointed out that many young people of today live their lives by a somewhat expressive, convivial, and hedonistic ethic, where primacy is given to the accomplishment of autonomy, enjoyment, experimentation, and self-fulfillment, at both the personal and career levels. Ball, Maguire, and Macrae’s (2000) study provides one of the first examples. The life experiences of the youth they interviewed, working exclusively in the so-called *new urban economies* mainly related to music and fashion, point to the materialization of this new life ethic. The authors observed an overlapping and blurring of the boundaries maintained between the participants’ personal and social, public, and private arenas of existence. Participants in their study lived according to the demands of a life of style—that is, of a life where the performance of an occupation, generally performed under some type of flexible employment, is but one among several significant areas of commitment. In other words, work in paid employment, although it remains central to social inclusion, no longer stands as these young people’s main source of identity. They attach an increased predominance to other life spheres such as music, fashion, and leisure.

Stokes and Wyn (2007), who drew on empirical data from several studies to assert that young people seem to show a tendency for balancing work and study

with personal relationships, well-being, lifestyle, and leisure. The large majority of participants in their studies ranked personal relationships as the main commitment in their lives, ranking these relationships even higher than work or career-related pursuits. In addition, for those already in the labour market, the way in which their job related to the rest of their lives weighed most in their decision to take it—for example, being close to family or leisure opportunities. Domene et al.'s (2012) findings pointed in the same general direction. Their study was designed to describe the kinds of projects for future work and life together that young couples jointly construe and pursue as they transition from post-secondary education into the labour market. Domene and colleagues identified five dominant, common themes around which participants' actions and goals were organized. These concerned pursuing and implementing career goals, balancing multiple priorities, deciding where to live, progressing in the relationship, and joining lives together. Career was simply one among other life priorities for most couples in their sample. In addition, each couple's specific project was closely connected to different superordinate projects. Goals concerning the pursuit or implementation of career goals (for example, to find employment) were combined with goals concerning the decision of where to live or how to progress in their relationship (for example, to move in together, to get married, or to have children).

For participants aged 21 to 30 years in Bujold and Fournier's (2008) study, occupational success was consistently related to a balance between work and other areas in life, and to an equilibrium in occupational and personal activities. As Stokes and Wyn (2007) noted, participants in their studies "overwhelmingly" understood career as a "personal journey that involved particular personal qualities" (p. 502). Brooks and Everett (2008) also concurred with the notion that young people nowadays tend to blur different areas of their lives, especially when it comes to work, learning, and leisure. Similarly, Brooks (2006) concluded that, more often than not, to work and study simultaneously was an option some youth in the sample took because they wished to maintain a certain student lifestyle (i.e., consuming and socializing). Earlier, MacDonald (1998), while working with young individuals with recurring stories of school failure and drop-out, observed the high likelihood of these youth living according to transition cycles that place them at either atypical and peripheral employment or unemployment. Often, this type of employment situation implies some changes in the relationships the young people establish between work and leisure because of the growing difficulties they experience when using work as stable framework for their lives. Consequently, they end up structuring their lives around leisure activities or alternative, and sometimes illegal, activities, such as those associated with the drug culture.

Biggart, Bendit, Cairns, Hein, and Mfrch (2002), using data from a transnational research study, reported that European youth usually name their family, friends, and other close relationships as the most important commitment areas of their lives. Even though work follows closely, it comes lower on their scale of preferences. Similarly, participants in Parada's (2007) studies, who were all experiencing the school-to-work transition, identified family and close relationships

as two of the most important areas of commitment. Work, too, was ranked as one of life's central domains, although the trend was for a decrease in its overall significance, and an increasing relevance was attached to leisure and to oneself as an individual. Parada's findings also seem to point to a shift in young people's priorities concerning the meaning they attach to work and careers. Specifically, participants in her studies, when asked to position themselves on a number of aspects concerning the significance of work and working in their lives, as well as to express their views on the subject, systematically emphasized dimensions concerning work's most intrinsically rewarding and challenging dimensions. For example, they mostly understood work as something that should make us feel good; learning and interesting work were the two work goals they ranked the highest; and societal norms concerning workers' entitlements (e.g., every person in our society should be entitled to interesting and meaningful work) presented higher agreement rates. As reported in Bujold and Fournier's (2008) study, the younger participants in their sample tended to express occupational success as a feeling of personal growth and self-actualization at work, and to see work as a means of accomplishment and enrichment.

Concomitantly, Valore and Viaro (2007) found that almost one third of their high school student participants identified fulfilling one's dreams in life and being happy and attuned with the world as significant life goals. Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, Bridell, Osgood, and Flanagan (2011), based on a 30-year observation of high school seniors' work values, concluded that more recent cohorts in their study placed lower priority on work as important in itself. In fact, adolescents in their study have increasingly reported that if they had enough money they would not work, a trend that is accompanied by the increased value they place on work that allows time for pleasure—that is, on jobs that offer more than two weeks' vacation and more time for other things in life. In both Valore and Viaro's and Wray-Lake et al.'s studies, materialistic expectations toward work—that is, the value young people attached to extrinsic work dimensions, as well as the willingness to be financially independent (a goal often attached to the pursuit of wealth and status)—are at the top of their priorities regarding most desirable features of occupations. Moreover, in Wray-Lake et al.'s study, although intrinsic work values consistently received higher endorsement than extrinsic work values across the 30-year period, a continuous decrease in the importance adolescents attached to intrinsic work rewards, such as the importance of acquiring and maintaining a useful set of skills or of having an interesting job, was observed since the early 1990s.

As Vinken (2007) asserted, based on his pilot study results, it is very possible that work values and orientations hardly play a role in influencing the meaning that young people assign to work and career in their lives. Perhaps, as Vinken noted, the assumptions underlying the body of instruments composing the "tool box of values research" (p. 18), despite their usefulness and proven validity, may not necessarily be aligned with contemporary youth's way of thinking. According to Vinken, these instruments were usually developed according to a set of linear, dichotomist assumptions, for example, material versus immaterial, expressive ver-

sus instrumental, extrinsic versus intrinsic (work) values. Thus, it is possible that these instruments no longer mirror the nonlinear ways in which youth combine key work goals. To some extent, this disjunction between the assumption underlying Vinken's instruments and youth's subjectivities might help to understand the apparently contradictory data just presented. Another possibility is that there is a difference in the life meanings and priorities between adolescents now entering their 20s, and earlier members of the post-1970 generation. However, as Wyn and Woodman (2006) asserted, this is a possibility "yet to be established" (p. 501).

Taken together, the findings reported thus far allow us to assume, as Lipovetsky (2006) suggested, that people today, and in particular youth living in Western contemporary societies, aim to achieve a life ideal of qualitative well-being—that is, a way of life that privileges the intense living of experiences and emotions, and the commitment to oneself and one's quality of life. This way of life allows the person "to classify and reclassify oneself in a hierarchy of contending symbols" (p. 35), thus mirroring a "narcissistic desire" of feeling in one's heart as a "quality person" (p. 44), and "not look like being *beneath everyone else*" (p. 46). In other words, individuals struggle to achieve specific priorities and lifestyles providing them with certain symbolic elements of personal and social identification, such as status and prestige, which reflect their sense of belonging to specific social groups or categories. These symbols maintain among themselves complex, often competing, relationships. In their incessant quest for self-actualization, individuals continuously organize and reorganize these symbols according to the specifics of the representation of themselves that, at that moment, they are committed to. To some extent, what drives individuals in this process of permanent classification and reclassification is the need both to differentiate themselves from the masses and to position themselves in a way that does not undermine their sense of self-worth.

The question that can be posed is how do life ideals such as the ones just portrayed cohabit with the labour market's current characteristics? Apparently not well. For instance, Mendonça (2007), in her study on emerging adulthood, concluded that study participants already in employment showed higher levels of identity diffusion than those currently attending higher education settings. In turn, Paulino (2008), while using Jahoda's (1982) model to study the effects of unemployment on a sample of recent higher education graduates, observed that, again in contradiction to most literature on the subject, employed participants revealed higher levels (not much higher, but significant) of activity deprivation than their unemployed counterparts. Both Mendonça and Paulino proposed the current flexible and de-regulated labour market as the most likely explanation for their results.

Most respondents in both Mendonça's (2007) and Paulino's (2008) research were less than 30 years old, thus belonging to an age group more likely to experience nonstandard and precarious work conditions (Bujold & Fournier, 2008). As Mendonça and Paulino observed, though people in such situations might show evidence of somewhat optimistic occupational representations, they often do not find a position or conditions allowing them to fully achieve such expectations. For example, the younger participants in Bujold and Fournier's (2008) study

were relatively inclined to see precariousness as being associated with an inability not only to take action and to plan a career path, but also to take some control over one's immediate and occupational future. On the one hand, the precarious nonstandard work conditions resulting from a highly competitive and constrained marketplace might compel people to reinterpret their efforts to maintain employability in a somewhat more positive lens—for example, to understand their work as some sort of leisure regardless of how time-consuming and stressful it might be (Lewis, 2003). On the other hand, situations such as precarious and nonstandard work conditions, from Fournier, Lachance, and Bujold's (2009) perspective and substantially in line with what Mendonça (2007) and Paulino (2008) observed, can easily result in a "large degree of suffering" (Fournier et al., 2009, p. 330), and progressively lead to a psychological withdrawal from one's work life. This circumstance is not necessarily accompanied by a significant reinvestment in other life arenas, such as family or friends.

In sum, research findings reported here seem to corroborate the notion that today's youth tend to endorse a work and life ethic favouring expressiveness and relationships. Although work tends to remain an important commitment in their lives, personal relationships and the ability to balance different life domains and priorities appear as even more crucial. For some, the work and nonwork arenas tend to be blurred and overlap, thus helping to further clarify changes in the centrality of work in young people's lives, and their alternative conceptions of career and occupational success. At the same time, at least in what concerns earlier members of the post-1970 generation, a marked preference for intrinsic work rewards is expressed. However, this does not mean that materialistic, extrinsic dimensions of work and working are not valued. Quite the opposite is true. These persist as some of youth's top priorities, especially for those now entering their 20s. As some of the documented studies suggest, the pursuit of this lifestyle and these priorities, oriented toward the ideal of well-being, does not cohabit well with current labour market characteristics. This leads some young people to feel a need to reinterpret actual work conditions through a more favourable lens, allowing them to feel somewhat optimistic.

Split Optimism and Openness About the Future, Flexibility, and Pragmatism

All in all, despite the unprecedented diversification of the routes leading to employment and the lengthier and more complex process young people have to go through while negotiating the acquisition and maintenance of a position in the labour market, many of today's youth do not show signs of being less optimistic about their employment prospects. Among the "most interesting (and in some ways perplexing) findings" of Rudd & Evans' (1998, p. 53) early study on youth transitions are the participants' degree of confidence about their ability to avoid unemployment regardless of the more or less favourable conditions under which local labour markets, at any particular moment in time, operate. Even so, adolescents in most recent cohorts of Wray-Lake et al.'s (2011) research tend to place a declining value on job security, although in itself this job characteristic

persisted as highly desirable for all the cohorts of adolescents they observed. The authors interpreted the decline in the value adolescents attach to job security as a sign of positive adaptation by this group of young people to current marketplace instability. As numerous studies show (e.g., Dupray, 2005; Margirier, 2004; Recotillet, 2000), during employment entry years, young people tend to go through a period of intense mobility. Youth under 24 years of age are responsible for nearly one quarter of all job changes occurring within the labour market (Breuil-Genier & Rincenc, 2000). Thus, as Wray-Lake et al. suggest, such a decrease in the importance adolescents attach to employment security is nothing but a “realistic expectation” (2011, p. 1126) toward a work context ruled by decentralization and discontinuity.

To determine the success of their labour market integration, youth ask themselves in varying ways and degrees to what extent the work allows them to use their problem-solving abilities and their communication and entrepreneurial skills. They also judge the work on the extent to which it reflects personal desire for autonomy, flexibility, creativity, and initiative (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2008; Parada, 2007). These characteristics are also identified in political and common-sense discourses as crucial for a person’s employability (Parada, 2007). The same applies to networking, which is another competence highly valued by youth in their efforts to access and sustain a position in the labour market. Many young people participating in Brook and Everett’s (2008) and Parada’s (2007) research firmly believe that a person’s networks end up determining the nature and number of job opportunities at his or her disposal. For participants in these two studies, this was the main, often only, resource sought while seeking a job, as well as one of the chief motives for choosing to combine work and study. The latter finding was corroborated by Stokes and Wyn (2007). Based on what they observed in their studies, Stokes and Wyn concluded that young people who combine work and study are “actively engaging in a process which positions them towards future employment” (p. 506). Being simultaneously a student and a worker enabled these youth to make educational or training choices reflecting their current interests and future goals. In other words, young people seem to have accepted and internalized the power of some material, and above all symbolic resources and informal mechanisms as a non-negligible factor setting apart individuals’ career prospects (Walther et al., 2005).

These findings not only can be regarded as an indication of how youth try to proactively and creatively manage the many constraints of today’s work world (e.g., Chisholm, 1999; Stokes & Wyn, 2007; Wyn, 2004), but also are in strict accordance with Nurmi and Salmela-Aro’s (2002) findings. Nurmi and Salmela-Aro determined that, depending on the perceived success or failure of the school-to-work transition, individuals reconstruct their goals according to the specifics of their current life conditions. Individuals who soon after graduation successfully accede to a position in the labour market congruent with their formal qualifications are more prone to reveal a decreased interest in the pursuit of education or training goals. For all those experiencing difficulties in successfully accomplishing

such transitions, alternative goals must be considered, namely those concerning the prolongation or diversification of education and training pathways. However, especially given the recent rise in youth unemployment statistics, it is unsurprising that, for the most part, young people tend to extend and expand as much as possible their formal education and training experiences, often even after labour market entry (e.g., Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Everett, 2008; Diepstraten, du Bois-Reymond, & Vinken, 2006; McDonald, Pini, Bailey, & Price, 2011; Parada, 2007; Vaughan, 2005). As many authors (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2006; Killeen, Turton, Diamond, Dosnon, & Wach, 1999; Parada, 2007; Sanquirgo, Turton, Killeen, Diamond, & Wach, 2004) argued, such an option mirrors a rather pragmatic, credential view of education and learning, perceived as a ticket to employment and labour market entry, and above all as a sign of one's competitiveness and employability.

Brooks and Everett (2008) described young people's continued (re)investment in education and training as *fishing for*, that is, as youth's deliberate efforts to seek out and benefit as much as possible from all available learning. Thus, to act according to "a kind of reflexive application of risk management, balancing *just-in-time* dynamism with *just-in-case* education" (Vaughan, 2005, p. 181) leads them to consider family formation as subsidiary to career development and financial independence (McDonald et al., 2011). The same applies to their movement between jobs and areas of specialism. For example, Vaughan (2005) talked about *job-shopping* and a concern with avoiding *settling down*, based on her interviewees' accounts. In Vaughan's opinion, such an attitude does not signify, on youth's part, a less intense commitment to their current occupation or learning experience. It simply tells us that they do not necessarily engage in a long-term vision or present a long-term plan narrowly focused on acquiring or maintaining a job in the same domain of their current employment. From Vaughan's perspective, such an attitude reflects a shift in young people's priorities and is inextricable from both their "general saturation in consumer-media culture" and strategic orientations of ongoing education reforms, privileging a "consumer approach" (p. 181) to this life domain.

In another study, Vaughan and Roberts (2007) observed two themes as dominating their respondents' interviews: "a drive for security and a desire for exploration" (p. 95). In their concluding remarks, the authors established a clear distinction between the meanings of these two themes. As they put it, exploration, without a doubt, constitutes a key dimension of individuals' career development. However, depending on the form assumed and the person's interpretation, security may be experienced in rather different, even opposite, ways. As their findings indicate, what some might understand as a good, safe thing—for example, having a job for life—others might translate into insecurity or anxiety—for example, feeling trapped or hesitant. To some extent, Diepstraten et al.'s (2006) work substantiates these assertions. Participants in their study exhibited an orientation toward learning and work as lifelong achievements, cross-sectional to all areas of life. Work and learning are closely intertwined with who one is or wishes to become, thus targeted toward exploration and designed with no definite long-term end goal or planning. Such an attitude facilitated a tendency to consider and commit

to “new, creative and knowledge extensive professions” (p. 188). This tendency allows young people to combine creativity and *being alternative* to commercially oriented activities, such as those mixing art or culture with commerce or sustainability with business. In other words, young people adopt an *and-and* logic to their business or career endeavours, instead of the more traditional approach based on an *either-or* weighing of alternatives. Often, such an option leads them to work as freelancers or as a “small-sized (if not single-person) network company” (p. 188).

Perhaps, as Brooks and Everett (2008) argued, these new ways in which some young people are engaged to learning and work are, above all, “an attempt to stay afloat” (Brooks & Everett, 2008, p. 387). On the other hand, it might just be that, as Vinken (2007) determined, young people more easily envision hybrid, even contradictory, alternatives to their futures, especially when it comes to their careers. Participants in Vinken’s study seem to have not yet developed a “convincingly sharp image” (p. 24) of what their future might be. They seem to be more prone to privilege transitory ideas about their prospective careers. Thus, they both oscillate between an “unclear and clearer picture” (p. 24) of the future and abstain from making choices in that domain. In turn, Sanders and Munford (2008), while questioning a sample of young teenage girls, verified that all queries concerning their plans in a 5-to-10-year period—which, to some, represented a time horizon corresponding to almost their entire lifespan—resulted in a less specific, less detailed portrait of imagined futures. Respondents focused mostly upon instrumental, pragmatic issues, with a very strong component of occupational themes (partly due to the questions asked), which they perceived as the privileged means of achieving their independence and autonomy. Conversely, when talking about the present or a 12-month timeline, relational topics, in both their positive and negative aspects, were preponderant in the young female interviewees’ accounts.

According to Cebulla (2009), until their early 30s, youth tend to anticipate fairly similar arenas of risk, mostly within the relational or financial domains. Regarding the latter, the consequences of living arrangements were identified. Furthermore, as the author’s research showed, these young people are more likely to worry about what the future might hold for them than their older counterparts. Cebulla explained these findings by suggesting that structural factors exposed younger cohorts in his study to more risks, such as job loss or income decline, and to potentially more adverse effects of such risks. In addition, younger cohorts in the study showed a tendency to commit to distinct patterns of lifestyles. This change in lifestyles not only adds to youth’s anticipation of adverse effects but also signals an adjustment to current complex and uncertain conditions. As Cebulla puts it, it indicates a “cognitive accommodation to risk an acceptance of living with risk” (p. 49). As Vinken (2007) observed, young people, especially those under 30 years of age, not only present the highest number of hopeful and fearful expectations about the future but also are the ones who feel more anxious about their career prospects. According to Vinken, individuals’ future perspectives play an instrumental role in the construction of career concepts, hence tempering the rather optimistic views about the future they otherwise exhibit. In other words,

findings presented thus far seem to corroborate Woodman's (2011) assertion that contemporary youth, with varying degrees of relatively practical or implicit and relatively explicit discursive forms of consciousness, mix multiple, and sometimes apparently contradictory, orientations and strategies toward the future. For example, a majority of participants in his study declared that they rarely thought about the future, preferring to live in the present. Yet success and putting an effort into shaping and securing that same future, even if only for the sake of financial security, while at the same time keeping their options as open as possible, were among their life's central designs.

According to what both Woodman (2011) and Leccardi (2005, 2008) argued, planning is not an easy task for young people of today. Because of the increasingly contingent world we live in, it is no longer easy, perhaps even impossible, for contemporary youth to commit to the construction of long-term biographical projects. However, this need on youth's part to keep their options open should not be understood as a sign that they no longer care about the future or have given up on trying to shape it. As both authors highlighted, young people simply do it in a different way. Contemporary youth learned to focus their (life career) projects on what Leccardi (2005) calls *extended present*: a "new time of action" (p. 46) that assumes as its basic reference "no longer the future but ... that time span short enough not to escape the social and human domain but long enough to allow for some sort of projection further in time" (pp. 45–46).

Parada's (2007) findings can be used to illustrate such an assertion. In her study, participants' narratives seemingly disclosed a special care for avoiding the imposition of deadlines or goals. These deadlines or goals, given their long-term character, would be a lot more difficult to control, and thus to achieve, because they are less specific or more diffused in time. Most likely, and much in line with Woodman's (2011) and Leccardi's (2005, 2008) views, many of today's youth actions are built as some sort of *anxiety damper*, capable of helping them not to lose their career or life paths' meaningfulness or direction, while allowing them to keep, as much as possible, the role of protagonist—that is, an agentic role allowing them to be the ones taking initiatives and intentionally making things happen.

In sum, the findings just reported seem to document what Stokes and Wyn (2007) characterized as a "flexible and pragmatic approach" (p. 502) to the multiple career and life decisions youth must face at this point of their lives. Overall, research findings point to a number of trends ascertaining the multiple, often contradictory, ways in which young people of today manage work or employment-related transitions. If, on one hand, they seem to value job security in itself, on the other the value attached to security in employment has been both declining and dependent on personal interpretations. These interpretations make the person understand it either as a good, safe thing or as a synonym for being trapped, of feeling hesitant. Personal qualities such as autonomy, creativity, or the ability to relate and communicate with others; networking, often coupled with the combination of work and study; the reconstruction of career goals according to specific circumstances of the school-to-work transition; and a rather pragmatic, credential

view of education and learning are other examples of how young people have been rather realistically adjusting to the many constraints imposed on them by today's (work) world.

Additionally, the findings we reviewed also point to youth's engagement with some alternative, somewhat more flexible ways of negotiating work and learning commitments, thus of constructing their careers. According to a just-in-case logic, young people make deliberate efforts to allow themselves to seek out and benefit as much as possible from learning or job opportunities as they come about. They balance this attitude with a just-in-time logic. Thus, although being committed to whatever they might be doing at the time, young people remain open to other job or career prospects, and do not necessarily engage in long-term, definite visions of their occupational pathways. Simultaneously, many youth seem to be able to innovatively combine, according to an *and-and* logic, economic success with creative, more alternative areas of activity, such as art or culture and sustainability. Not surprisingly, attitudes like the ones just described can be enmeshed with a split optimism about the future. Many youth seem to be both hopeful and fearful about the future. They seem to have accepted risk as an invariant in their lives. Apparently, the means by which they constructively deal with the uncertainty implied by such recognition and acceptance is both to keep their options open and to commit to time spans that are short enough to be understood as somewhat controllable and long enough to allow some sort of future projection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER AND COUNSELLING THEORY AND PRACTICE

The research reviewed tends to highlight the following trends as the most significant in youth work transitions. First is the emergence of a somewhat expressive and hedonist life ethic. This ethic is reflected in the primacy given to a sense of self-fulfillment and experimentation, often leading to diverse ways of balancing, even blurring, work and nonwork areas of commitment. This life ethic is also reflected in what seems to be a shift in youth's priorities concerning the meanings attached to work and careers. Second, young people seem to have some ability to deal creatively, although pragmatically, with several contextual constraints that might otherwise hinder their progress in work and career. At the same time, they seem not only to have shortened the future to an extended present, but also to prefer to keep their options open as much as possible. By doing these two things, many youth expect to regain some sense of agency or control over their lives. Career and counselling theory and research have not been oblivious to ongoing transformations in the world we live in, much less to the challenges such changes impose on many of the prevailing, more traditional views of work and careers.

Of late, many career and counselling authors have begun to critically address the societal, political, and economic complexities of today's world (e.g., Amundson, 2005; Blustein, 2006, 2011; Collin & Young, 2000; Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2012; Richardson, 2009; Savickas, 2000, 2011). These authors have also recognized the need for a paradigm shift allowing researchers to reassess the "major constructs and

semantic frameworks that structure our inquiry and intervention” (Richardson, 2009, p. 76). Although, as Collin and Young (2000) argued, it is impossible to map all the probable contingencies a person can face throughout his or her career, several efforts designed to enhance our understanding of the impact contemporary realities have on individuals’ experiences and sense of identity are being made.

Savickas (2011), in spite of his somewhat skeptical view of current career theories, also recognized that numerous advances have recently been made. In his opinion, many current career theories still do not “adequately account” (p. 253) for the flexible, discontinuous circumstances of present-day labour markets or the needs of many precarious, nonstandard workers. According to Savickas, relevance within the career counselling theory and practice field can only be achieved if the conceptual models and interventions proposed “effectively address the important questions asked by people in a society” (p. 254). Thus the question: how has career and counselling theory and practice, especially what is proposed by authors and models aligned with some of the more recent developments in the career field (e.g., Blustein, 2006, 2011; Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2012; Richardson, 2009; Schultheiss, 2007; Young & Valach, 2004, 2008), addressed the previously identified trends on youth transitions to work?

Youth’s Current Life Ethic

Although no career counselling models or theories intend to specifically address young people’s changed (work) lifestyles and aspirations, some recent proposals within the career field allow us to account for such transformations. Examples of these models concern Richardson’s (2009) counselling for work and relationships, Schultheiss’s (2007) cultural relational paradigm of work and worklife, and Blustein’s (2006, 2011) relationally informed approach to the psychology of working. These authors endorse a point of view that, as Collin and Young (2000) say, “looks beyond the experiences of individuals” (p. 278). They adopt a “nonessentialist view of work ... and worklife” (Schultheiss, 2007, p. 192), assuming a holistic, more “realistic view” (p. 192) of the individual. Individuals are understood as embedded and actively engaged in numerous, interrelated cultural relational or social contexts that do not progress independently. An idea that resonates with Guichard’s (2004, 2009) notion that the *making of oneself/self* (*se faire soi*) takes place through a process of life-long self-construction, where multidimensional relationships are being continuously established within and across a person’s dynamic system of subjective identity forms. Guichard (2009) defines subjective identity forms as “sets of ways of being, acting and interacting in relation to a certain view of oneself in a given context” (p. 253).

This holistic, multidimensional view of the individual agrees with what we documented about the ways in which today’s youth experience their work and careers. Specifically, it allows for us to account for the somewhat blurred and overlapping ways in which young people seemingly live their lives (e.g., Ball et al., 2000; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Everett, 2008). For these youth, work is but one of several intertwined arenas of commitment allowing them to achieve whatever

personal or career goals they have set for themselves. In other words, and as MacDonald's (1998) results seem to show, work no longer necessarily acts as the main source of identity. Whenever work cannot function as a stable framework in young people's lives, such a structuring function is transferred to other life domains, such as leisure or personal relationships. Thus, the emphasis seems to be, as Richardson (2009) asserted, on "what a person does" (p. 77), regardless of its being done in the *market work* or in the *personal work* arena of one's life. Market work concerns all activities performed within formal employment structures with the intention of providing goods, services, and care to others. Personal work concerns all work taking place in the private arena of a person's life and as such is unpaid and done for the sake of oneself, one's family, and one's community.

More than being about what a person *is*, work and work-related activities end up being about a person's potentially transferable competencies and skills required for the performance of an occupation or job. As Richardson (2009) emphasized, this is a "simple and radical shift" (p. 77) that, as the findings in our review seem to show, is closely aligned with "the more fluid work identities" (p. 78) being constructed by today's youth as a response to the demands and challenges of contemporary (work) life (e.g., Ball et al., 2000). Nonetheless, according to a contextual, relational perspective, the performance of all work roles and responsibilities persists as being crucial for the development of a *sense of embeddedness*, that is, a "feeling of belongingness, and of being included in some sort of social network" (Schultheiss, 2007, p. 196). Work is understood as a culturally embedded, relationally lived experience, where people strive to accomplish connections, support, affirmation, attachment, and mattering (Blustein, 2011; Collin & Young, 2000; Richardson, 2009; Schultheiss, 2007). Interactions with family, peers, social networks, and cultural factors (profoundly) affect all work-based decisions, transitions, and experiences. In Guichard's (2004, 2009) terms, each of these interactions correspond to different subjective identity forms. While mapping them out, individuals become aware of the more central or peripheral role each one of these subjective identity forms, at that specific point in time, has in their lives. They also become aware of the types of relationships each subjective identity form establishes with the other subjective identity forms in their system, in particular if they are perceived as a resource, an obstacle, or independent of one another.

Both Guichard's (2004, 2009) and the cultural, relational informed assertions permit us to substantiate some of the findings in our review, in particular, the fact that today's youth prioritize not only personal relationships over work (e.g., Biggart et al., 2002; Parada, 2007; Stokes & Wyn, 2007), but also the balancing of work and nonwork in their lives (e.g., Domene et al., 2012; Stokes & Wyn, 2007; Wray-Lake et al., 2011), which, in Bujold and Fournier's (2008) study, was equated to occupational success. People's lives, according to the authors and theories we have discussed, not only evolve according to a diversity of patterns and pathways, but also result from a person's active participation in the environments he or she lives in. Thus, it is possible to assume that individuals construct their lives and therefore exert some degree of agency over their experiences and

trajectories (Richardson, 2009). However, as Blustein (2006, 2011) repeatedly reiterated, not all individuals manage to “experience a degree of choice in their lives” (Blustein, 2011, p. 1). Similarly, Schultheiss (2007) noted that not everyone has the opportunity to position themselves “as they please” (p. 194), and, through that process, construct volitional careers. Ongoing changes in contemporary life settings introduced “major shifts in the landscape of the world of work” (Blustein, 2011, p. 4). Even highly educated workers around the globe experience a decreased volition in the construction of their careers, thus challenging traditional conceptualizations within the career field of what a “good working life” (p. 4) means. Nonetheless, as Blustein (2011) noted, these individuals constitute a rather small minority. Many others, especially those constrained to extremely vulnerable work situations, and to whom the reality of their lives only made room for “less than optimal” (p. 2) education or occupational-related choices, fall in the “full spectrum of work people do to survive” (p. 3).

Consequently, as Blustein (2006, 2011) maintained, the meaning a person attaches to work and working cannot be dissociated from one’s understanding and sense of purpose attached to the performance of work-related tasks and activities. This view appears corroborated by the research findings on youth transitions to work. Overall, young people’s representations of career and their expectations toward work and working conform to many assumptions underlying the concept of volitional careers. Examples concern their understanding of career as a personal journey relying on personal attributes (Stokes & Wyn, 2007), of work as a means of accomplishment and enrichment (Bujold & Fournier, 2008), as well as the significance they attach to the achievement of fulfillment and happiness (Valore & Viaro, 2007). The same could be said about their explicit preference for work’s most intrinsic dimensions (e.g., Parada, 2007). However, these findings co-exist with others pointing to seemingly contradictory trends, such as the increase in the importance attached to materialistic work values (Wray-Lake et al., 2011), and consumption and socializing (Brooks, 2006). Perhaps, as the authors of these studies argued, these findings reveal a realistic adjustment to current work conditions and, much in line with what Blustein (2011) suggested, mirror their anticipation of working as something many people around the world do mostly to survive. It is even possible that such a realization underlies findings such as the ones depicted in Mendonça’s (2007) and Paulino’s (2008) studies.

In sum, although not designed with that specific purpose in mind, a number of recent models developed within the career field (e.g., Blustein, 2011; Guichard, 2009; Richardson, 2009; Schultheiss, 2007) provide us with a useful framework for understanding youth’s changed lifestyles and priorities, specifically in what concerns their somewhat convivial, expressive (work, life) ethic. By adopting a holistic, multidimensional view of the individual, these career and counselling models allow us to account for young people’s seemingly changed work centrality and more fluid work identities. By clearly outlining the (dominant) assumptions underlying the volitional career, they help us to explain not only the meanings

young people attach to work and working but also the often less positive consequences of holding such intrinsically rewarding expectations when labour market integration takes place.

Youth's Flexibility and Openness About the Future

The literature on the ways in which young people deal with the numerous constraints imposed by today's fluid and unstable career and life circumstances revolves around two main ideas. On the one hand, youth's practical approach to work transitions is grounded both in a realistic assessment of labour market circumstances and a credential-oriented, strategic approach to education and learning. Such an adaptive attitude allows them to "move from project to project" and therefore "maintain their employability" (Savickas, 2011, p. 256). Examples are the youth in Brooks and Everett's (2008), Diepstraten et al.'s (2006) or Vaughan's (2005) studies, who kept themselves open to and always in the search for whatever learning or job opportunities might come their way. On the other hand, there is what seems to be a change in young people's temporal orientations, presumably signalling the ways in which they have creatively learned to deal with the uncertainty and unpredictability currently shaping people's experience of the future. Findings from Parada's (2007) or Woodman's (2011) studies are illustrative of these more flexible, often contradictory, orientations toward the future. Contextual action theory (Young & Valach, 2004, 2008), and the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2003, 2012) are two of the available models within the field of career and counselling that allow us to address complexity and change in young people's careers.

For the chaos theory of careers, the notions of complexity and change are inherent to human experience, and thus to career development. Individuals and the environments they live in are characterized as "complex, dynamic, nonlinear, unique, emergent, purposeful open systems" (Pryor & Bright, 2003, p. 123). These systems are "inherently unpredictable." However, due to systems' "self-organizing tendency to pattern and relationship" (Pryor & Bright, 2003, p. 123), a *dynamic stability* can be achieved. This is demonstrated by *aperiodicity*, that is, the system's "tendency to follow a self-similar pattern over time, albeit a pattern that does not exactly repeat" (Pryor & Bright, 2012, p. 70). In other words, order emerges because "eventually (that is, over time)" (Pryor & Bright, 2003, p. 123) systems self-organize into patterns. Thus, reality, according to the authors, is an extremely complex, nonlinear, interdependent, dynamic system. Reality contains an "impossibly large number of contingencies and interrelations that are subject to continuous and nonlinear change" (Pryor & Bright, 2012, p. 70), strongly constraining people's ability to plan, predict, and control ongoing and expected life events. Furthermore, because of the role played by uncertainty and unpredictability in the general functioning of such systems, the future no longer is "some image a long way off." Rather it appears as something "as close as the person's next choice, next thought, and next action" (Pryor & Bright, 2003, p. 123)—that is, it is contingent.

According to what is posited by the chaos theory of careers, any career outcome is but one possible alternative that might have occurred, and therefore the impact of very small differences on the result that the system strives to achieve must not be neglected. This systemic dynamism and openness facilitates individuals' ability not only to react but also to creatively deal with and transform the relationship presently being established with the (work) world. To some extent, the declining value of job security, documented by Wray-Lake and colleagues (2011), can be understood as a sign of individuals' (or systems') ability to adapt to a situation where the desired end result of a (permanent) job may not be within young people's reach. However, this is not the only situation where the chaos theory of careers is substantiated by findings in our review. Other examples concern findings such as the ones reported by Vinken (2007), Cebulla (2009), and Sanders and Munford (2008). Young people's mixed representations about what the future might be or hold for them (Vinken, 2007), their inability to anticipate their future in detail over somewhat extended periods of time (Sanders & Munford, 2009), as well as their acknowledgement of the potentially adverse effects of the risks they are exposed to are illustrative of what chaos theory describes as the inherently dynamic and unpredictable nature of systems. This assumption is extensible to the notion that, for contemporary youth, planning—at least a planning beyond the extended present (Leccardi, 2005)—is not a realistic or even a desirable endeavour. As Woodman's (2011) and Parada's (2007) findings seem to show, young people, although without giving up on trying to shape their futures, choose to keep their options open, not establishing rigid deadlines or goals, especially over rather extended periods of time. Thus, it can be expected that, as asserted by Pryor and Bright (2012), aperiodicity is demonstrated over time.

Complexity and change are embraced by contextual action theory through the acknowledgement of the dynamic, multidimensional nature of human actions, projects, and careers. Through these notions, contextual action theory recognizes and accommodates the self-governing, self-actualizing nature of human experience (e.g., Young & Valach, 2004, 2008). Action, project, and career are “temporal and contextual interpretative and prospective schemas” (Young & Valach, 2004, p. 503) that maintain complex, hierarchical relationships among themselves. Through their actions, people construct projects and careers. They also make sense of their own and others' behaviour across time. Thus, according to contextual action theory, action must be understood as a dynamic, open to change and a changing system. Agency is possible because our bodies operate as “instruments of action” (2004, p. 509). Agency is understood as “founded on our embodiment in the existential realities of our lives” (p. 509), and is inseparable from the notion of intentionality. All human action is intentional. It is a goal-directed endeavour, and an immediately available construction of individuals' cultural, social, and psychological worlds.

When interconnected and directed toward rather focused, mid/short-term goals, retrospective and prospective meaning-making processes substantiate a project—that is, a “heuristic system” enabling individuals “to proceed toward their goals by exploring possibilities rather than following strict guidelines” (Young

& Valach, 2004, p. 502). As suggested by several of the findings reported (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2008; Parada, 2007; Stokes & Wyn, 2007), networking is one of the ways through which young people proceed in their attempt to achieve the goal of finding, maintaining, or even gaining a more advantageous position in the labour market. The sequence of actions they set forward in order to attain this goal is, in contextual action theory language, a project. A project such as one of finding a job or becoming financially independent, as documented by McDonald et al. (2011), often supersedes other projects, like the one of forming a family. Alternatively, finding a job or improving one's position in the labour market are projects that may coexist with others such as the desire to expand or benefit as much as possible from one's learning opportunities. The latter might be a goal in itself (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2008; Diepstraten et al., 2006), but it also might constitute the way through which youth proceed toward the accomplishment of other goals, such as maintaining or improving their current position in the labour market (e.g., Vaughan, 2005; Vaughan & Roberts, 2007). The expressions used in the literature accounting for these processes were varied: fishing for (Brooks & Everett, 2008), balancing of a just-in-time dynamism and just-in-case education (Vaughan, 2005), or job-shopping (Vaughan, 2005). Furthermore, to commit to learning might be either a means to accomplish security or to avoid settling down, when security is interpreted as feeling hesitant or trapped (Vaughan & Roberts, 2007). The process by which all of what was mentioned is done, as documented by Nurmi and Salmela-Aro (2002), and in agreement with what contextual action theory asserts, seems to be one of reconstructing one's goals according to perceived current life and work circumstances.

In sum, what was previously asserted for the contextual, relational models of career and counselling applies to contextual action theory and the chaos theory of careers. Both theories provide us with a useful framework for understanding youth's strategies for negotiating complexity and change while constructing their careers. Through the notions of action, project, and career, contextual action theory allows us not only to account for youth's zigzagging through learning and work tasks and responsibilities, but also to understand and describe the intentionality inherent to their actions. By conceptualizing reality as an extremely complex, nonlinear, interdependent, dynamic system, where chaos and order coexist, the chaos theory of careers allows us to put into perspective the multiple, often contradictory, orientations and strategies of today's youth toward the future.

CONCLUSION

As Savickas (2011) suggested, "reflective practitioners" currently working in the field of vocational guidance and counselling must constantly ask themselves what and how available career intervention models and techniques may best be used to help clients successfully navigate a lifetime of education and work transitions. Research trends presented echo the notions of *biographical individualization* and of a *risk society*, long held by authors such Bauman (2001) and Beck (1992). These

notions allow us to emphasize the ways in which ongoing societal changes impact individuals' ways of acting and being. They also allow a portrayal of individuals, in particular young people, as beings whose unique, uncertain, and ambiguous life conditions confront them with "infinite ... waning possibilities," as well as with an outstanding opportunity to exert "a constructive critique" (Eco, 1970, p. 61) over all that is going on. Despite all the debate around the adequacy of current career theories and their implications for counselling practice for such new and complex realities, we demonstrated that the field already possesses numerous theoretical approaches and constructs capable of effectively addressing the new trends in youth work transitions.

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