

Preface

This book is about how young people become adults and how counseling can help in that process. Becoming an adult, like so many other “becomings” in our lives, is a process. This process involves others. We do not become adults without the support and participation of others. Similarly, we do not write books without the participation of others. In this case, we wrote much of this text, but were aided by José Domene, Matthew Graham, and Anat Zaidman-Zait. These three individuals not only authored specific chapters, but were also centrally involved in much of the empirical research on which this book is based.

Transition to Adulthood: Action, Projects, and Counseling arose from several experiences and studies. Based on a number of our earlier studies, we conducted two qualitative research studies about the transition to adulthood. In one study we were able to follow 20 parent–youth dyads over a 6–8-month period. The second study involved young people and their counselors addressing transition to adulthood issues. These research studies were designed in such a way that we obtained data on what each young person and their parent or counselor did together to facilitate or, despite good intentions, hinder in some cases the transition to adulthood. Their joint actions invited an in-depth presentation and discussion, to which we hope we have done justice in this book.

The perspective and data we take in this book was supplemented by several other research studies conducted by the authors on a range of related issues with adolescents and their parents, including such issues as romantic relationships, adolescent peer relationships, health, career development, addictions, parenting, suicide, and with younger adolescents, Aboriginal families, couples, and others.

Finally, over a number of years in a variety of joint ventures, we have contributed to the development of the contextual action theory of career and to a distinctive qualitative research method, the action-project method, both of which are discussed extensively in this book. This approach goes beyond conventional theorizing and research in counseling. However, it responds to both contemporary research in neurology and attempts to overcome the theory–practice divide in counseling. It provides a ground on which practice-relevant theorizing and theory-based counseling practice can unfold. It is an approach in which practitioners and clients can link

their past and their future, enabling them to work on issues which matter in a way that is relevant to them.

What is particularly new in this book is that it represents our most extensive discussion of the use of contextual action theory in counseling. The transition to adulthood allows us a particular focus to discuss the dimensions of counseling from this perspective. But the application of contextual action theory to counseling is not limited to this population of young people or to the issue of transition. Counselors and therapists from a wide range of specialties and orientations will resonate with the perspective taken up in these pages.

In 1991, Ernest Boesch, the action theorist and cultural psychologist, predicted that action theory would make inroads in many areas of psychology. He suggested that in the case of counseling and psychotherapy, action theory would be particularly important. Boesch's prediction has been realized in a variety of ways, as there are now many approaches to counseling and psychotherapy in which aspects of this perspective are evident, for example, narrative therapy, solution-focused therapy, constructivist approaches, and relational counseling. While each of these is making distinct contributions, none has fully embraced a conceptualization and method based on action theory. This is what we have attempted to do in this book.

Because action theory addresses intentional goal-directed action, it is readily applicable to counseling. Counseling is first and foremost an action. In particular, it is a joint action.

This book is organized in three sections. The first section serves to introduce the topics of the transition to adulthood, contextual action theory, and counseling from this perspective. It also provides a description of the research method that guided much of the data and cases presented and discussed in this book.

In the second section, that is, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13, we devote each chapter to a different theme that is represented in the transition process. Each of these chapters illustrates the theme with one or more case studies and, as appropriate, draws implications for counseling practice. The topics addressed in these chapters are broad, as are the issues that youth face in the transition to adulthood process, and overlapping. The chapters on relationships do not exclude identity issues, and vice-versa.

The third section of this book provides readers with some practical directions in engaging in counseling practice informed by action theory. Two aspects of particular relevance are working with narrative and interpretation, and the use of the self-confrontation is discussed in some detail.

We are indebted to a host of young people and their families who have contributed to this work as research participants or clients. We are also indebted to a number of professional counselors who gave us access to their work with clients. In addition, we have been assisted by a large number of graduate and undergraduate research assistants over many years who have contributed immeasurably to this work. They include Michelle Behr, Ashley Cavanaugh, Stewart Deyell, Yaari Dyer, Adam Easterbrook, Kristin Foulkes, Carla Haber, Bradley Kauffman, Celine Lee, Corinne Logan, Amy Mart, Serita McLelland, Jessica Nee, Carey Penner, Hajera Rostram, Wayne Spence, Alison Stevens, Becky Stewart, Laura Templeton, and

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