

Toward a Theory of Discontinuous Career Transition: Investigating Career Transitions Necessitated by Traumatic Life Events

J. Michael Haynie
Syracuse University

Dean Shepherd
Indiana University Bloomington

Career researchers have focused on the mechanisms related to career progression. Although less studied, situations in which traumatic life events necessitate a discontinuous career transition are becoming increasingly prevalent. Employing a multiple case study method, we offer a deeper understanding of such transitions by studying an extreme case: soldiers and Marines disabled by wartime combat. Our study highlights obstacles to future employment that are counterintuitive and stem from the discontinuous and traumatic nature of job loss. Effective management of this type of transitioning appears to stem from efforts positioned to formulate a coherent narrative of the traumatic experience and thus to reconstruct foundational assumptions about the world, humanity, and self. These foundational assumptions form the basis for enacting future-orientated career strategies, such that progress toward establishing a new career path is greatest for those who can orientate themselves away from the past (trauma), away from the present (obstacles to a new career), and toward an envisioned future career positioned to confer meaning and purpose through work.

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Aaron always wanted to be a Marine. He enlisted at age 18, and he wore his uniform proudly. Aaron lived the ideals of the Marine Corps, and the organization rewarded him with quick promotions as a result. At age 24, he went to war. Just short of his 25th birthday, Aaron found himself critically wounded and in a hospital fighting for his life, the victim of a roadside bomb. It was at that moment, Aaron reports, that he lost faith in humanity. His trauma was made worse by his realization that because of his injuries, his career as a Marine was over.

Aaron's experience represents a traumatic life event, one that is extraordinary, evokes fear and helplessness, and is experienced as a threat to survival (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). The psychological impact of an experience like Aaron's is typically profound; the traumatic event serves to shatter an individual's closely held assumptions about the self, the external world, and the relationship between the two (Janoff-Buhlman, 1992; Magwaza, 1999). Aaron's trauma was compounded by the realization that his injuries would effectively terminate a career that he valued highly. For Aaron the linkage between career and identity was particularly salient and pervasive, as a consequence of military socialization practices replete with symbols, artifacts, and ceremony designed to cultivate a conception of self-identity that is

intertwined with the military organization (Budd, 2007; Hale, 2008; Lande, 2007). Aaron's career as a Marine evolved to become the foundation of his own self-narrative, the story he told to himself and the world about who he was and where he belonged (Baumeister, 1991; Neimeyer, 2004, 2006). To understand the power of this linkage, consider that in the years preceding his injury, Aaron told us, he would introduce himself to new people by saying, "I'm Aaron; I'm a Marine." After his injury, Aaron reported that he would not introduce himself to new people, because he "didn't know what to say." The career that informed his most closely held beliefs about who he was had been terminated the instant that bomb exploded in Iraq.

Investigating careers informs the nature of the relationships between individuals, organizations, and society (Hughes, 1958; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2006). Traditionally, career research has focused on internal labor markets and career progression, examining how individuals move within organizations and through a series of jobs, typically with increasing levels of authority and responsibility (De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2008; Owan, 2004). More recently, career research has acknowledged the prevalence of interorganizational mobility (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Valcour & Tolbert, 2003), stressing the importance of the external labor market (Cappelli, 1999; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Although this research has provided considerable insight into the enablement of career transitions, there has been less focus in the new careers literature on career constraints (Arnold & Cohen, 2008) and on how individuals adapt to new careers (Savickas, 2002).

The physical and psychological consequences of Aaron's trauma represent a substantial career constraint, and his career transition will require considerable personal and role development. Personal development involves altering his frame of reference, values, and other identity-related attributes (Nicholson, 1984) and

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J. Michael Haynie, Department of Entrepreneurship and Emerging Enterprises, Whitman School of Management, Syracuse University; Dean Shepherd, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University Bloomington.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to J. Michael Haynie, Department of Entrepreneurship and Emerging Enterprises, Whitman School of Management, Syracuse University, 721 University Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13244. E-mail: jmhaynie@sy.edu

is required because Aaron's traumatic experience shattered his fundamental assumptions of the world, others, and self (APA, 1994). Role development involves altering (or creating) the requirements of the new career to match his needs (Nicholson, 1984) and is required because Aaron's injuries terminated opportunities in the internal labor market and because he faced considerable obstacles to interorganizational mobility, given his highly specialized (i.e., military-related) knowledge and skills. Although we have a growing understanding of how people cope with traumatic events in their personal and family lives (Benight, Swift, Sanger, Smith, & Zeppelin, 1999; Bonanno, 2004), the impact of these situations on careers is less understood. Indeed, Nicholson (1984) noted that investigating the mechanisms important in such extreme situations may provide an opportunity for scholars to gain a deeper understanding of how career transitions are experienced and managed, which can direct career research in a way that enhances its value (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). Therefore, our purpose in this study was to consider the lived experiences of careers (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004) in the context of individuals facing discontinuous career transitions necessitated by traumatic life events. As such, we adopt a definition of career as "the unfolding sequence of a person's work experience over time" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6). Our research aim was to develop a theoretical framework that informs how individuals experience and manage such discontinuous transitions.

It is also important to briefly highlight the practical relevance of this research. Aaron's situation is extreme, based on its wartime context, but the unfortunate truth is that the discontinuous nature of his transition is not uncommon; instead, it is a reality faced by a large and growing population of individuals across the globe. For example, in 2008, more than 1.2 million workers in the United States suffered serious injuries in the workplace that required significant time (more than 20 days) away from work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). The rate of major injury in the workplace is similar in the United Kingdom, where 105 major injuries per 100,000 workers were reported to the Department of National Statistics in 2008 (National Statistics, 2009). Further, research suggests that these statistics significantly underrepresent the prevalence of workplace injury because many injuries go unreported (Probst, Brubaker, & Barsotti, 2008). Although it is difficult to determine from available statistics what percentage of these individuals are forced to transition to new careers as a result of their injuries, available data do imply that a significant percentage face discontinuous transitions. For example, almost 18% of those injured in U.S. workplaces suffered injuries that resulted in enduring physical or mental impairment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). In the United Kingdom, almost 55% of the major injuries reported in the workplace were musculoskeletal disorders, which are typically both enduring and debilitating. Further, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, the prevalence of these major injuries is greatest in skilled trades (i.e., construction, commercial fishing, manufacturing) in which physical limitations due to injury are most likely to slow or terminate career progression (National Statistics, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). This is why such research is important on a larger scale.

Contemporary advances in medical technology have resulted in an unprecedented number of individuals surviving major combat injuries. However, a consequence of this otherwise positive outcome is a situation characterized in the popular press as a "social

and economic tsunami" that will overwhelm the ability and resources of the public sector for a generation. Experts now suggest that close to 30% of those who served in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will live out their lives with enduring physical and/or psychological disabilities attributable to their military service. Given that 2.5 million individuals from the United States and United Kingdom alone have served in these combat zones in the past decade, this translates to a population of upwards of 650,000 individuals possibly facing discontinuous career transitions necessitated by trauma. Unfortunately, this number will continue to increase in the coming decades.

As prior research has not explored career responses to traumatic life events, we adopt a multiple case study approach in this article to develop an emerging theory about the mechanisms that are important in this type of transition. As Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) suggested, building an emerging theory from rich data sources is "one of the best [if not the best] bridges from rich qualitative evidence to mainstream deductive research" (2007, p. 25). We analyze across cases to identify emerging conceptual insights (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), and as suggested by Yin (2003a, 2003b), we contrast cases of individuals who transition well with cases of those who transition less well.¹ Based on similarities within and differences across the categories of cases, a model emerges that informs the mechanisms of discontinuous career transitions in response to traumatic life events.

We focus on 10 cases, each of which is based on a U.S. military member who experienced combat trauma and who was subsequently discharged from military service when his injuries made it impossible to perform his assigned work role. Our sample size is consistent with that of other theory-building studies employing the multiple case method (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997 [9 cases]; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007 [12 cases]). The nature and context of our cases are very similar: For each case, we (a) consider and capture the individual's career progression and life course prior to the transition, (b) specifically identify the impetus for the transition and capture the career and psychological implications of his traumatic event, and (c) ensure that the transition is important and ongoing (each individual planned on a military career and was progressing well to that end, and each faced constraints in terms of his path-dependent mobility and progression).² Finally, with regard to career-transition strategy, each individual had enrolled in a vocational retraining program focused on entrepreneurship. This similarity across cases provided a common context in terms of the discontinuous nature of the transition and also provided an espoused identity and career "standard" against which we could consider career-orientated cognitions, behaviors, and outcomes related to how each individual experienced and managed the

¹ Our approach for assessing the individual's progress toward a new career path for each case is described in more detail later in the article.

² Intent to pursue a military career prior to trauma was based on self-reports to the authors. Career progress was based on reviews of each individual's military performance reports (for the 3-year period prior to their trauma experience). This review was conducted by an experienced military officer who indicated to the authors that each participant was positioned for a successful military career. Limitations on path-dependent mobility are attributed to involuntary separation from the military (discharge) as a consequence of trauma.

transition process. Our induction from these cases provides insights both into how individuals experience a discontinuous career transition in response to trauma and into the mechanisms important for those individuals who have transitioned well in terms of constructing and executing new career paths.

Sample, Method, and Data Analysis

Cases

Each individual (represented by a case) applied for and was selected to participate in a career retraining program in entrepreneurship. The training program was specifically designed for military personnel who had experienced combat injuries and, as a result of those injuries, had been discharged from military service. The 14-month program consisted of both online and resident training as well as ongoing mentorship and support. There were 107 applicants for the training program, and 25 applicants were selected to receive the training. Selection for the training program was based on an extensive application survey, external recommendations, and interviews. The selection criteria for the program included those measures typical of competitive education programs, including strength of recommendation letters, past academic success, personal statements, and interviews. From those who completed the training, the researchers then selected 10 cases for this study. As conventional when using theoretical sampling, we selected two groups of cases that included contrasting outcomes (Yin, 2003a, 2003b). Our sample included those who have transitioned “well” into new careers (five individuals) and those who have transitioned “less well” (five individuals). Our purpose in this research informed the cases we selected. As Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) noted, “Theoretical sampling of single cases is straightforward. They are chosen because they are unusually revelatory, extreme exemplars, or opportunities for unusual research access” (p. 27). Each of these sampling logics applies to the cases selected for this study.

First, these cases are well positioned to confer insights into the relationships among constructs important to this study, because we were able to identify clearly that each participant had experienced a traumatic life event that necessitated a career transition. The severity of the physical and psychological trauma experienced by the participants was also generally uniform in nature across all cases: Seven of the 10 participants were injured as a direct or indirect consequence of some type of improvised explosive device, and three suffered gunshot wounds. To document and support the determination that each participant had experienced a traumatic life event that necessitated a career transition, we gathered multiple sources of data, including documentation supporting the individual’s application to the program (e.g., military discharge paperwork, letters of support, application essays, medical disability determination) and self-reports and reports from others (caregiver interviews, participant interviews, online journaling). Further, each participant was evaluated by a medical evaluation board (MEB), and we were able to access the findings from these evaluations through the participants. The MEB is composed of a panel of military physicians and mental health providers who review each case to determine (a) if the individual’s disability is directly related to his military duties and (b) if that condition precludes the individual from reasonably performing in his assigned work role in

the future. For each case in this study, the MEB determined that the individual’s medical condition was a direct consequence of his work role and that the condition would dictate termination of his military career.

Second, we were assured that each individual’s career transition was both important and ongoing. All individuals around whom the cases were built were within 3 years of being discharged from military service as a result of their combat trauma. This is important because it ensures that the career-transition process was ongoing throughout the period of data collection for each individual. Further, each participant expressed aspirations for entrepreneurship as a postmilitary career, thereby articulating an identity standard against which to consider progress (Burke, 1991). We selected a sample of cases based on an assessment of the participants’ progress toward constructing and executing new career paths in response to trauma-induced career transitions. These cases were chosen based on data (e.g., progress reports, e-mails, mentorship, interviews) that provided insight into the progress of their career transitions, which were accumulated over a 24-month period after the conclusion of the retraining program.

Third, over a 3-year period we were granted uncommon access by the participants (and other close caregivers to the participants) to information regarding their past career information, the details related to their trauma, and their ongoing experiences with transitioning from military to civilian life. Because there was a high level of trust between each participant and the author team, the participants were willing to share their deepest and most personal feelings regarding their trauma and transitions with us for the purposes of this research.

Finally, we suggest that the sample is well positioned to confer insights into the relationships among constructs important to this study because the military’s institutionalized socialization tactics created a group of individuals who are exceedingly similar with regard to their values, beliefs, and overall worldviews. This fact conferred to us a unique opportunity to draw conclusions and identify conceptual insights that we could more confidently attribute to the dynamics of the transition process, as opposed to other individual differences. This last point is important and warrants a brief discussion.

Research demonstrates that for highly specialized vocations—or situations in which organizations are situated in dynamic, novel, and uncertain environments—organization-specific socialization processes are enacted to create person–organization fit (Kristof, 1996). Socialization processes employed to create fit can generally be described as being situated along a continuum of tactics, anchored at one end by *institutionalized* approaches that are designed to foster loyalty and a collective identity based on shared norms, values, and beliefs and at the other end by *individualized* approaches that are positioned to encourage innovation and a strong sense of self. Military socialization tactics are almost exclusively institutionalized, the goal being to create an individual whose conception of self is largely defined by the organization. Such extreme socialization practices arguably characterize an approach to the management and development of human capital that is efficient, effective, and necessary, given the extreme mission of a military organization. Put simply, the more strongly an individual internalizes the identity of “soldier,” the more likely that individual will act like a soldier under conditions of stress and duress (i.e., conditions characteristic of a combat environment). As

an illustration, consider the response of a senior U.S. Marine Corps officer when we asked why he was so certain that his young Marines would react to a hypothetical situation in a particular way: "They'll do what I tell them to do because they're Marines." However, while such extreme socialization serves the needs of a combat force, it is mutually exclusive with the development of a strong sense of "individual self." We suggest that the fact our cases shared this common socialization experience represents a unique research opportunity. It allowed us to generate insights that we can more confidently attribute to the transition process rather than to other individual differences, such as considerable heterogeneity in prior career experiences and culture. In the end, for the reasons cited above, we suggest that our sample was positioned well to offer new insights into the dynamics of discontinuous career transitions as responses to traumatic life events. In the next section, we describe our data collection efforts.

Data Collection

The data collected to build each case are extensive and dynamic and include multiple converging sources across multiple time intervals.³ These data comprise self-reports (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, personal journal entries, telephone and e-mail correspondence with training program staff), relevant other-reports (e.g., interviews with spouses and caregivers and reports from professional supervisors and/or military commanders), and archival data (e.g., official military performance reports and medical disability determinations). In Figure 1a, we demonstrate the vocational life courses for the study participants as anchored by their combat trauma. Each individual is represented by a horizontal bar. The bar to the left of the combat trauma represents the length of military service and depicts when the individual was deployed to combat. The period of active military service varied from 18 years and three combat deployments (Bart) to 24 months and one deployment (Brendan). The bar to the right represents the period of time after the traumatic event and is segmented based on periods of postinjury hospitalization (dark shading), the pretraining period (light shading), and the posttraining period (moderate shading). The greatest span of time for any individual between combat trauma and the start of the vocational training program was 36 months (Bob), and the shortest was 11 months (Andrew).

To build each case, we started with the individual's application to the entrepreneurship training program. The application and associated documentation included information about each individual prior to and immediately after the trauma. These materials provided (a) basic demographic information (including age, gender, ethnicity, and educational background); (b) military career information (years in service, number of combat tours, rank, awards, training, and official military performance reports for a 3-year period prior to the trauma); (c) documentation as to the nature and extent of the combat injury; (d) letters of recommendation to support the individual's application to the training program from former commanding officers, fellow soldiers or Marines, caseworkers (mostly from the Veterans' Affairs Hospital), and/or professional supervisors; and (e) extensive responses to application questions that required the individual to describe his current situation, future goals, motivation to enter the program, and reasons for pursuing entrepreneurship as a future career.

Second, the data compiled for each case included transcriptions of all correspondence between the individual and the staff of the training program before, during, and 24 months after the formal conclusion of the training program. These data primarily consisted of e-mails (mean number of e-mails was 12 per person) and also included notes based on telephone and in-person conversations (mean number of phone conversations was 17 per person, and the mean number of in-person conversations was five per person). Also included in these data were transcriptions of the individuals' reflections and responses to questions about their goals, fears, aspirations, and motivations for entrepreneurship as a career, which were collected from their online journals. Online journaling was a required component of the training program for 30 days prior to the commencement of the training program.

The third source of data was semistructured interviews conducted by the first author with each individual (and caregiver when available). The interviews were conducted approximately 16 months after the participants had completed the formal component of the entrepreneurship training program (e.g., coursework). Given the role and purpose of the interview within the larger context of our data collection efforts, we determined that it was important to allow time to pass following the training program, so the individuals could experience entrepreneurship as a career. We conducted seven of the 10 interviews in person and the remaining three over the phone. All interviews were captured on audiotape and were subsequently transcribed. Our interview protocol was used as a guide only. The interview revolved around four themes: (a) a focus on the individual's motivations, goals, feelings, and aspirations associated with joining the military; (b) a retelling of being sent to combat and the traumatic event that led to his disability and career loss; (c) a discussion about leaving the military and returning home to reconcile his future and cope with the trauma; and (d) a description of the entrepreneurship training program and his vision and perspective of his (future) career. On average, each interview lasted 70 min, with some exceeding 120 min. The shortest interview was 47 min. Participant interviews were supplemented with interviews from a significant caregiver for each participant (when present and available). These caregiver interviews provided validation of the participants' responses and also advanced the robustness of the cases. We followed a similar format when interviewing the caregivers (mostly spouses). These interviews typically lasted between 45 and 70 min (with one exception that lasted for 22.5 min). Three of the participants were no longer in close contact with their most significant caregivers because of divorce. One participant, Alex, identified a support provider who was in the process of coping with combat injuries himself, and for this reason, we did not feel it was appropriate to proceed with an interview of this caregiver. As noted by Yin (2003b), "Interviews should always be considered verbal reports only. As such they are subject to common problems of bias, poor recall, or inaccurate articulation. Again, a reasonable approach is to corroborate interview data with information from other sources" (p. 92). Thus, we corroborated our interview data with information from the other sources detailed above and illustrated in Figure 1.

³ This research project, including the data collection protocols and the study design, was guided by the ethical principles and standards accepted as appropriate for the protection of human subjects in behavioral research.

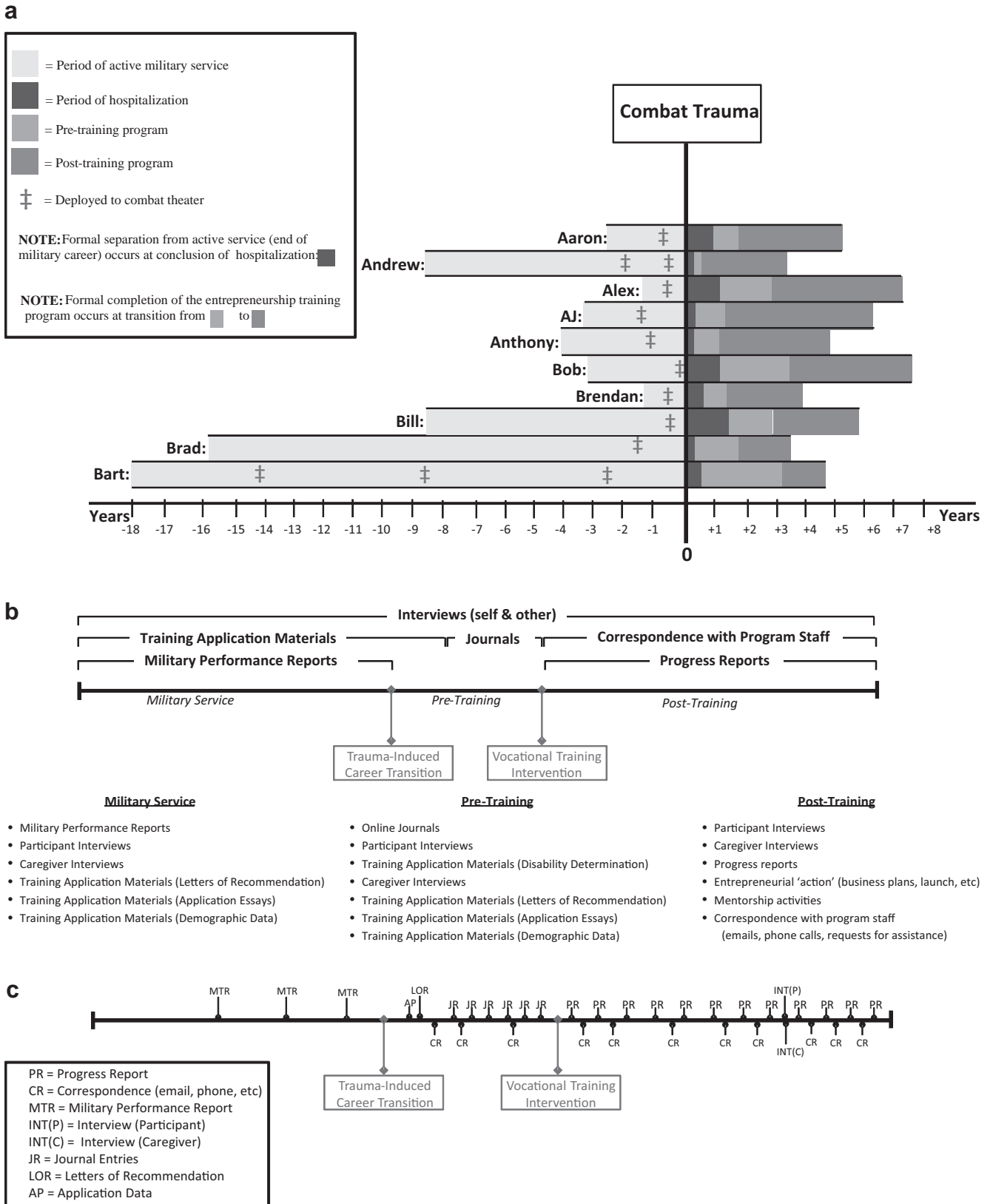


Figure 1. a: Vocational “life course” interrupted by combat trauma. b: Multiple sources of data and period covered. c: Multiple points of data collection for the multiple sources of an example.

Finally, to capture each participant's progress toward a career transition after completing the training program, we collected data (at 8-week intervals over 24 months) along three key dimensions that are representative of the behaviors, cognitions, and outcomes consistent with an entrepreneur's career path: (a) the number of venture steps meaningfully pursued by the individual (e.g., legal formation of a venture, a completed business plan, active search for financing); (b) ongoing and active engagement with an entrepreneurship career mentor, and (c) actions undertaken to pursue additional education and/or training that relates to furthering new career goals. These data were collected based on responses to e-mail requests for formal progress reports and were in the form of telephone conversations, business plan drafts, first sales, and so on.

Data from the numerous sources identified, which were representative of multiple time periods throughout the transition process, were synthesized to build a case for each participant (on average, 125 pages of transcribed and coded data contributed to each case). In Figure 1b, we illustrate the multiple sources of data leveraged to build each case and also the stages of the transition process represented by the data. The use of multiple sources representing multiple time periods allows for the development of converging lines of inquiry informing a model of discontinuous career transition. In Figure 1c, we illustrate the multiple points of time at which data were collected from the various sources. The data collection effort illustrated in Figure 1c is typical of all cases. It is important to note that multiple data collection efforts from a particular source provide the opportunity for temporal evidence of consistency or change. For example, multiple annual military reports can provide evidence of participants' consistently high performance in their military roles (before combat trauma), and multiple posttraining progress reports can provide evidence of progress (change) in their new entrepreneurial roles.

Categorization of Cases

Our sample was all male, and the average age of participants was 29.2 years. Of our sample, 40% of the participants were U.S. military officers, and the remaining 60% were U.S. enlisted soldiers and Marines. The average years of military service prior to their trauma experience was 9.4 years, and 60% had college degrees or were taking college courses at the time of their injury. We categorized the participants based on the context of their career transitions in response to trauma as those transitioning well and those transitioning less well. The basis for this categorization included assessments of both subjective well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and progress throughout the posttraining period related to actions and outcomes central to an entrepreneurial career (e.g., venture creation, first sales, additional training).

In terms of subjective well-being, transitioning well was represented in terms of positive affect (e.g., "during the day, when I'm actually doing business stuff, I don't think I really think about me being injured or anything like that. . . . I'm excited about the future" [Aaron; posttraining progress report]; "I love my life, even the little things about it. I'm not saying that in a conceited way; I've found what I fit in" [AJ; posttraining interview]; and "I'm at the best point in my life today, right now, I've never been in a better position. Now and every day it just gets better" [Andrew; posttraining progress report]). We also considered the absence of negative affect (e.g., "It's [the trauma and loss of career] some-

thing in the back of my mind that is always there, you know, and always will be there, but I've kind of come to grips with it" [Alex, posttraining interview]). Affect was assessed in several ways. First, as part of the interviews, the first author asked the participants to generally describe how they felt about themselves on that day and how they felt about the world. Second, he asked their significant others (when available) a similar question about their perceptions and observations concerning how the study participant felt on that day and also how he felt about the world. Finally, the authors collected all statements from each participant's progress reports and other correspondence (e.g., e-mail updates, requests for assistance) over a 24-month period following the conclusion of the training program. Data were coded in terms of positive feelings and negative feelings. We independently coded the data for each case.

When coding the data, we followed the multiple case study methodology advocated by Yin (2003a, 2003b). Data represent segments (or chunks) of text or other information (collected from the various sources that contribute to a case) that the researcher identifies as possibly being substantively related to the general "how" and "why" questions that motivate the research (Yin, 2003a). To build an individual case, we combined all data in an extensive table or matrix and assigned a code based on the second author's assessment of how an individual piece of data related to the general topic of inquiry and the purpose of the case study (see Tellis, 1997). So, a construct or theme that emerges within a case would not simply be many segments of data coded "x" from a single source but would necessarily require many segments of coded data "x" where "x" was represented across multiple sources. This approach leverages what Yin (2003a) described as converging lines of inquiry, which allow "the investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues" (p. 98).

In addition to assessing affect, we independently coded the ongoing progress reports, interviews, and other correspondence between the participants and the program director to assess progress related to actions and outcomes central to entrepreneurship. Such actions and outcomes included information related to career milestones (e.g., venture creation, first sales), relationships with mentors, professional networking activities, additional training and education related to entrepreneurial careers, and similar outcomes. Each of us began the coding process with hypothetical examples of each progress category (high, medium, and low). We then independently categorized each case in terms of high, medium, or low progress toward "career transition" (high being significant progress in career transition and low being minimal to no progress).

After independently coding and categorizing the data, the authors came together to compare their coded results for each piece of data that contributed to building an individual case and subsequent categorization of each case. There was 91% agreement; that is, for 91% of the segments of data, the authors independently arrived at the same categorization. Where there was disagreement, it was typically on the margins of the categorizations (e.g., moderate or high; low or moderate) of a segment of text or other information. In those cases of disagreement, the authors discussed the segment and the reasoning for their choice and then compared and contrasted the focal segment to agreed upon segments rated marginally above and below, which led to an agreement. We illustrate these assessments in Table 1 and provide examples of the

Table 1
Progress in Discontinuous Career Transition Categorizations

Case	Self-report positive		Self-report negative		Category A participants		Other-report positive		Other-report negative		Category and vocational outcomes	
	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low	High	
Andrew	Example: "I guess I'm fine. But then it's like wait a minute, I guess I am kind of messed up and I'm just kind of coming to the realization that I'm a different person."	Example: "It's just a reminder, whether it's through pain in my neck or my arm, I just know it's there."	Moderate	Low	Example: "He just seems so much more positive now, focused."	Low	Example: "Thank you so much, he is a changed man. He has turned a corner."	No references	Example: "He still gets angry sometimes, when he feels like he is losing control, but it's better."	Venture creation (1), internship (2), mentor engagement (Yes), additional training (1)	High	
Anthony	Example: "I think for the most part I'm at peace with it, and I think the reason that I think about it is to draw [from] those experiences."	Example: "I don't feel angry about it . . . It's just more of a frustration with myself."	Moderate	Moderate	Example: "He still gets lost in his own mind and disconnects, but now he comes back to us more quickly."	Moderate	Example: "He still gets angry around other people, but he gets angry pretty easily and judgmental, so I guess that's one thing—yeah."	Example: "He still gets angry around other people, but he gets angry pretty easily and judgmental, so I guess that's one thing—yeah."	Moderate	Examples: Venture creation (1), attending college(1), mentor engagement (Yes), civic engagement (1)	High	
AJ	Example: "Good, real good. I mean, better than I ever have, I guess. Because I found the beginning of what I'm supposed to be doing."	No references	Low	Low	Example: "He still gets lost in his own mind and disconnects, but now he comes back to us more quickly."	Moderate	Example: "He still gets lost in his own mind and disconnects, but now he comes back to us more quickly."	Example: "He still gets lost in his own mind and disconnects, but now he comes back to us more quickly."	Moderate	Examples: Venture creation (2), professional certification (1), mentor engagement (Yes), additional training (2), public speaking (2)	High	
Aaron	Example: "That I was ultimately just looking out for our safety and my guy's safety and that's why I made that decision. And you know what, I'm at peace with it."	Example: "I still to this day have a lot of dreams."	High	Moderate	Example: "He understands why that happened to him and what he needs to do to overcome that."	High	Example: "He understands why that happened to him and what he needs to do to overcome that."	Example: "He still gets frustrated with the little things, things that wouldn't bother other people."	Moderate	Examples: Venture creation (2), professional certification (2), mentor engagement (Yes), additional training (3), marriage (1), civic engagement (2)	High	
Alex	Example: "I wouldn't change a thing because it changed the person I was to who I am now. It really put a lot of things in perspective with life."	Example: "It's something in the back of my mind that is always there, you know, and always will be there, but I've kind of come to grips with it."	High	Moderate	Example: "Alex finally has a purpose that can keep his attention, and that has made all the difference."	Low	Example: "Alex finally has a purpose that can keep his attention, and that has made all the difference."	No references	No references	Examples: Venture creation (1), completed college (1), mentor engagement (Yes), advanced education (1), civic engagement (1)	High	

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Case	Self-report positive	Self-report negative	Other-report positive	Other-report negative	Category and vocational outcomes
	Category B participants				
	Moderate	High	High	Low	Moderate
Brendan	Example: "I'm doing a heck of a lot better . . . but I still catch myself scanning rooftops for snipers and waking up after nightmares and stuff like that." Low	Example: "Probably a couple times a day [I think about events leading to injury]." High	Example: "He is back in school, focused, and seems to be doing very well." High	No references Low	Examples: Venture creation (1), attending college (1), mentor engagement (No), civic engagement (1) Moderate
Bart	Example: "All those things are hard to do, but over a year plus, I've been pretty successful because I actually beat those doors open, enough to overcome." Low	Example: "Yeah, you just say no, but I'm living, going forward. Yes it's dark, pitch black dark, but that's okay, there's no one there but me." High	Example: "But he can dig deep within him and make it happen . . . He can transform his mind to say I can, to achieve as much as I possibly can and I'll deal with the pain later." Low	Example: "I overheard him talking about somebody in traffic and they blew the horn . . . he was just so angry. That floored me, because that's not the person that I've known." High	Examples: mentor engagement (Yes), civic engagement (1) Moderate
Bill	Example: "I feel pretty good. I mean I do know that I have a long way to go . . . but I see a light at the end of the tunnel. I know I can get there." Moderate	Example: "It's hard to explain, but I'm not the same person I was before, and people don't get that." Moderate	Example: "Wow, I mean this is a man who sat in a dark room for hours a day, just crying. What a change." Moderate	Example: "He can't focus for long, even now. That is one of our biggest issues, we fight about it." Moderate	Examples: college(1), mentor engagement (No), civic engagement (1) Low
Bob	Example: "Great. I don't hate this feeling anymore. In the beginning when it happened and now, you have no idea [the improvement in how I feel]." Moderate	Example: "It was a life-changing event [being wounded]. You think about it every day." Moderate	Example: "We went from a man who spent 90% of his time on the couch or sleeping to the man who is very active now . . . He has more energy—a million times better." Moderate	Example, spouse: "I think that he's as much at peace with the physical injuries because he deals with side effects . . . I think he's accepted that as much as he can right now." Moderate	Examples: Venture creation (1), venture termination (2), mentor engagement (Yes), additional training (1) Moderate
Brad	Example: "I feel good, man. I mean I have a lot to do and it's been slower than I'd like, but I know we'll turn a corner soon." Low	Example: "I guess I'm just not feeling like things are working out like they should. I mean, come on, this isn't the deal, right, broken-down body and no job." High	No references Low	Example: "All his energy is focused toward what's wrong, how he has been wronged, he just can't let go." High	Examples: additional training (1), mentor engagement (No) Low

Note. There was 91% initial categorization agreement between the authors in their coding; that is, for 91% of the segments of data, the two authors independently arrived at the same initial categorization. Data included in progress categorizations are all sources referenced at Figure 1 representative of the posttrauma time period. High: More than 7 positive affect references and less than 2 negative affect references; Moderate: 3–6 positive references and less than 2 negative references; Low: 0–2 positive affect references and more than 2 negative affect references.

data in each cell. Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants, such that the names of those individuals categorized as transitioning well begin with the letter A and the names of those categorized as transitioning less well begin with the letter B.

As illustrated in Table 1, there were meaningful differences across cases in terms of level of progress toward transition. Aaron, Alex, and AJ generally demonstrated high positive affect, and Andrew and AJ demonstrated low negative affect. All five in category A have made substantial progress toward career outcomes based on the activities and behaviors associated with entrepreneurship as a career and identity standard (e.g., venture creation, business plan). This is in contrast to Bob, Brendan, Bill, Brad, and Bart. Bill and Brad have made minimal progress. Despite moderate levels of progress, Brendan and Bart both experienced high levels of negative affect (Bart also experienced low levels of positive affect). Bob has also made moderate progress but has not experienced high levels of positive affect (moderate) or the absence of negative affect (moderate). Therefore, although Aaron, Andrew, Alex, AJ, and Anthony appear to be transitioning well (Category A), Bob, Brendan, Bill, Brad, and Bart appear to be doing less well (Category B).

Data Analysis

Given our categorization of cases, within-case analyses by the second author highlighted constructs and relationships that captured the career transition for a single individual. It should be noted that these constructs and relationships were allowed to emerge without a priori propositions. As the second author continued the within-case analyses, he began to notice patterns across cases but withheld analysis of these similarities and differences. The authors independently evaluated the segments within a case (as reported in the following tables). There was considerable agreement between the authors in their coding. Where there was disagreement they discussed the segments, discussed the reasoning for their choice, and then compared and contrasted the focal segment to agreed upon segments rated marginally above and below, which led to agreement.

Once the within-case analyses were complete, we followed the procedure adopted by Eisenhardt (1989) and others (Yin, 2003a, 2003b) to conduct a cross-case analysis focusing on the similarities in constructs and relationships across cases. After noting similarities and differences across these cases, we formed tentative propositions. We then refined these tentative propositions to compare across cases and observe patterns. In attempting to reconcile the differences between the two groups in terms of their progress toward constructing and executing new career paths in response to trauma-induced career transitions, we found that patterns emerged from the data that suggested a process model of transition.

Results and Model Inducted From the Data

Rebuilding Shattered Assumptions as a Career-Identity Foundation

Career is inextricably linked to identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). From the time children enter grade school, they are asked “What do you want to be when

you grow up?” (Fouad & Bynner, 2008, p. 241). Answers to such questions inform nascent conceptions of self-identity by situating the individual within a broader social and organizational context, thereby motivating, directing, and limiting behavior (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). We opened this article with the case of Aaron, a young Marine whose identity was strongly informed by his career and who was nearly killed in combat when an explosive device detonated underneath his vehicle. Aaron, reflecting on his trauma experience, said in an interview that “I was a 23-year-old cocky Marine. I was fit, tops in the Marine Corps, and then it [his injury] happened. I was completely helpless, hopeless. I couldn’t do anything for myself. As soon as my first injury happened my confidence was gone, and I was shattered, I doubted myself.”

Consistent with the classic outcomes of trauma, Aaron’s experience served to shatter his fundamental assumptions that the world is benevolent and meaningful and that he had self-worth (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Our data illustrate that his traumatic injury was compounded by the loss of his military career and that the consequence had profound and devastating implications for his ability to conceptualize a salient identity. Aaron continued,

I didn’t care about life anymore. What now if not the Marines? I saw the evil side of humanity, and I didn’t need it—I didn’t want to live anymore. It was a night-and-day difference. It’s like I was fed up with everything and honestly came to the point where I was suicidal. I came to the point in my life where I didn’t care if I lived or died.

Another soldier, Brad, exemplified the interconnectedness between his sense of self and career when he described his attempts to rejoin the military after his physical wounds had healed. Prior to the start of the training program, he wrote in his journal:

I’ve tried to reenlist and get things back on track, back to where I was, and they say I’m not qualified [because of my disability]. That just kills me. I mean, I am highly skilled, highly trained, went to every advanced school possible, promoted early, everything, and now because of what I went through to serve my country, I can’t be that guy anymore? It just can’t be like that.

The close linkage between career and identity indicated by the statements above illustrates the complexity inherent in such a discontinuous transition. For an individual whose conception of self is strongly informed by his or her career, the termination of that career threatens self-identity and generates feelings of alienation, hopelessness, and despair.

Researchers have focused on understanding why, in response to threats to identity, some individuals are more readily able to create and subsequently internalize a new conception of self, while others experience difficulty and/or are slow in doing so. Research on trauma (Janoff-Buhlman, 1992; Magwaza, 1999) suggests that rebuilding these shattered assumptions may begin with actions to reconstruct a coherent self-narrative that is representative of an internalized and evolving story that is constructed from a person’s selective attention to aspects of the past, present, and future (McAdams, 1999). Neimeyer (2004, 2006) suggested that “self-narratives are the very substance that is disrupted by trauma and loss” and that (re)constructing such self-narratives is “heavily implicated in posttraumatic resilience, repair, and transcendence” (2006, p. 68). This suggestion is consistent with Sugarman’s (2001) ideas concerning narrative approaches to career, where the career narrative becomes a mechanism to understand an individ-

ual's life course. In the context of how one experiences and manages a discontinuous career transition in response to a traumatic life event, our analysis reveals that effectively reconstructing a career narrative serves to distinguish those who transitioned well from those who transitioned less well. However, the emerging career narratives that could be inducted from the data (among those categorized as transitioning well) only began to emerge after those individuals were able to construct a "macro-narrative" positioned to help them make sense of their trauma in a way that contributed to reestablishing their fundamental assumptions and beliefs about the world and self. This macro-narrative appears to represent the launching pad from which more micro-narratives, such as those described in the career literature, can commence and develop.

In the context of our focus on career, we conceptualize this macro-narrative as the *career-identity foundation*: a salient set of internalized and closely held assumptions about the world, humanity, and self that forms the basis for enacting career strategies positioned to confer meaning and purpose through work. The data indicate that those transitioning less well have yet to establish a career-identity foundation as a basis from which to subsequently author a coherent and future-orientated narrative for their new career path; the emergence of the career narrative is obstructed in the absence of these more macroassumptions about the world, humanity, and self. Further, our data highlight differences in the behaviors and cognitions adopted to inform the career-identity foundation, which offers an explanation for why some participants were able to effectively manage the discontinuous career transition and others were not.

The data provide evidence of Aaron's attempts to construct a coherent narrative of his traumatic experience, a story that becomes the basis for his future actions to realize meaning and purpose through work. Success at constructing this narrative is related to his approach to coping with trauma. In the period following the injury, Aaron's approach to coping was almost exclusively emotion focused.⁴ In an interview, he said that in the months after he was released from the hospital, he engaged in excessive drinking and drug use and slept much of the day. For Aaron, his drinking and drug use were ways to "numb myself. I didn't care. I was very reckless. There was a point in my life when I came back, and after I got out of the hospital, I was just very reckless in my life. It was foolish and stupid—I'd say it was very wrong, but that's just what happened." Others used similar emotion-focused strategies for coping in the periods following their trauma and career loss. Throughout the interview, Bill detailed extreme rage, anger, and drug use as his way to cope with the trauma; AJ's wife reported that her husband would "just sit alone in the dark and cry." Drinking (Aaron, AJ, Alex, Bill, Bart, Brad, and Bob), antisocial behavior (Aaron, Anthony, AJ, Brad, and Bart), and a reliance on medication to "forget" about their experiences (AJ, Bart, Brad, and Aaron) were emotion-focused strategies adopted in the periods following their trauma and career loss that study participants described repeatedly in their interviews, journals, and other correspondence. However, for Aaron and the others categorized as transitioning well, the data provide evidence that their approach to coping migrated over time, away from emotion-focused strategies and toward a strategy based on problem-focused coping.

For example, Aaron noted that in the period following the training program, he came to recognize obstacles preventing him from coming to terms with his experience, such as the fact that his friends were enabling his dysfunctional behaviors: "Well, they held me back for sure. Just going out and drinking and hanging out and just cutting loose. But with that s**t, I wasn't going anywhere in life. Just the same stupid stuff" (e-mail; 24 weeks posttraining). Further, in his progress reports and other posttraining correspondence with program staff, Aaron referred to beginning a dialogue with his wife about his experience (e-mail; 16 weeks posttraining), making efforts to seek professional counseling (progress report; 40 weeks posttraining), and becoming part of a support group for combat veterans (progress report; 40 weeks posttraining). Engaging in these problem-focused coping activities appeared to help Aaron build a foundational level of psychological subsistence, such that he could formulate a macro-narrative positioned to help him make sense of his trauma and reestablish his fundamental assumptions of the world and self. Aaron had by no means come to terms with his trauma, but he was able to sufficiently orient himself away from the past and toward the process of constructing a coherent narrative of self based on the selective attention to aspects of the past, present, and future (McAdams, 1999). As a consequence, he became self-aware of the imperative of reconstructing a conception of self as a basis for his future career development. In an interview (64 weeks posttraining), Aaron said,

It was a very slow transition. It wasn't like I just woke up one day, and you know, I'm going to put all that stuff aside, and I'm going to turn the page and end a chapter in my life. I was unhappy with life, I was unhappy with where I was at, and I knew I was going to do the stuff that I needed to get to where I wanted to go, so I started making changes. . . . I think as humans we all need to have hope. I think that's a purpose for living. I think without a purpose to live, that's self-explanatory. You've got to have a purpose to live . . . mine is to become an entrepreneur.

For those categorized as transitioning well, our data tell a similar story with regard to how each individual experienced and managed the transition process. Like Aaron, the others categorized as transitioning well cited a heavy reliance on emotion-focused coping strategies as initial responses to their traumatic experiences. However, also like Aaron, all of these individuals referenced abandoning emotion-focused strategies in favor of problem-focused approaches as they progressed through the transition process. Over the 24-month posttraining data collection stage, many of these participants made reference to seeking support from other veterans (Alex, AJ, Andrew, and Aaron), seeking professional counseling (AJ, Andrew, Anthony, and Aaron), and engaging in self-reflection (AJ, Andrew, and Anthony).

We can induce from the data certain cognitions and behaviors enacted by those transitioning well to build foundations for future

⁴ To characterize the behaviors and cognitions present in the data, we draw from the literature of coping with trauma and loss. This literature generally distinguishes between two types of coping strategies: (a) *problem-focused coping*, which describes actions and cognitions aimed at addressing the underlying problem causing the specific distress, and (b) *emotion-focused coping*, which describes actions and cognitions aimed at ameliorating the negative emotions associated with the underlying problem causing the specific distress (see Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

identity-building activities. For many, it was the realization that their families needed them (Anthony, AJ, and Andrew) or that they wanted to set an example for others (Aaron and Alex). AJ referenced efforts to make sense of his trauma through the stories of others who had walked in his shoes: "I've heard the perspective of a lot of Vietnam guys who still haven't let go of a lot of that stuff . . . and I think that helped because I saw them. I've got to get rid of this. These guys are like sixty years old and still talking about dragging people out of their car and beating them up. I can't live like that the rest of my life" (e-mail; 16 weeks posttraining). The other cases of those transitioning well described similar efforts to construct foundations for reconceptualizing their sense of self. Alex wrote in his journal that "a lot of it was just looking inside myself and thinking through everything and facing it internally . . . My way to come to terms with it was to sit down and say this is what happened and why, and this took about a month straight, but once it was over with, I could talk about my experiences." During an interview, Andrew recalled a "soul-searching moment of saying the world wasn't what I thought it was going to be. And I kind of went through that internal sort of wait a minute, this is what I need to be doing. And it kind of just came to me as I was trying to figure things out. This makes perfect sense. This is what I need to do" (64 weeks posttraining). Anthony credited his wife for helping him see his true self; he wrote that "I had someone to share my feelings with and someone who actually cared. Someone to be there for me, to hold my hand. . . . She helped me realize that I did have a problem" (e-mail; 20 weeks posttraining).

So, although those categorized as transitioning well appear to have formulated (or are on their way to formulating) coherent narratives of their traumatic experiences that represent solid foundations for subsequent efforts to construct a career narrative, our data highlight that those transitioning less well have made only minimal progress to that end. Consider the case of Bill, who has yet to formulate a career-identity foundation as a basis for enacting future-orientated career strategies. Bill said, "I mean, I know why I did it, like why I chose to serve my country and all that, and that is nothing that, I mean I get that and I always have. Now I'm [long pause], now I need to figure out what's next for me because what I thought I was about, you know, where I'd be now, and my family would be, I just can't get there" (interview; 64 weeks posttraining).

Further, Bill detailed throughout the interview and also in progress reports that his approach to coping with trauma and transition involved extreme rage, anger, and drug use, and he expressed a profound feeling of a lack of control over his life. He noted in an e-mail, "I just used to feel like I could handle any situation and now I just don't feel that way" (48 weeks posttraining). Brad demonstrated a similar distance as a result of his traumatic experience and its consequences, saying in an interview (64 weeks posttraining) that "I just didn't want to be around people and s**t and, I didn't have any patience. My wife tries to get me to talk sometimes, but I really just won't have it. None of it." As evidenced by data from their journals and interviews and from caregiver interviews, Bill and Brad focused a significant amount of their energy and attention on attributing blame to others for their situations. Brendan related feelings of hopelessness and despair, saying, "You're just in limbo, survive day to day. You just keep telling yourself it will get better once my life changes" (progress report; 52 weeks posttraining). Bart made a similar attribution when asked about moving forward in the face of his trauma; he

noted "you wake up another day, and another day passed you by; you wake where you were last week" (e-mail; 68 weeks posttraining). Our data suggest that attempting to develop a micro-narrative representative of a new career without first establishing a more fundamental, macro-narrative based on foundational beliefs about the self and the world may be a fruitless endeavor. In Table 2, we provide additional evidence that distinguishes between the cases based on the presence or absence of a career-identity foundation.

Motivation, Discontinuous Career Transitions, and Trauma

Past research on careers highlights self-employment as a career choice for specific groups (disabled individuals, women, ethnic minorities, and immigrants) as a response to perceptions that they are shut out of (or face obstacles to) advancement in traditional vocational roles (Kendall, Buys, Charker, & MacMillan, 2006). Indeed, people with disabilities often have strong interest in entrepreneurial careers (Callahan, Shumpert, & Mast, 2002), which explains the significantly higher rates of self-employment among people with disabilities as compared to people without disabilities (Arnold & Seekins, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). One of the most common explanations for why self-employment is such a common path for people with disabilities relates to how self-employment can ensure certain physical accommodations and confer greater flexibility over other aspects of life and work that are important for people with disabilities (Arnold & Seekins, 2002; Hagner & Davies, 2002).

We have found that investigating the motivations for self-employment among individuals who experience discontinuous career transitions in response to traumatic life events contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological link between individuals and careers. In Table 3, we illustrate what the cases revealed about the individuals' motivations regarding self-employment. We characterize our findings based on two types of motivations: entrepreneurship as a career path based on perceived or real obstacles to other career paths (push motivation) and entrepreneurship as a career path based on satisfying some psychological needs rooted in trauma and transition (pull motivation). Consistent with the extant literature was a push toward entrepreneurship as a result of some individuals' perceptions that physical limitations would close the door to some types of careers (push motivation—physical). Without any discernible pattern distinguishing those who were transitioning well from those who were transitioning less well, seven of the ten individuals repeatedly cited concerns about issues related to their physical limitations as pushing them toward the perceived flexibility and accommodation inherent in an entrepreneurial career. Brendan, for example, said in an interview, "Yeah, the physical stuff, I live with it—back, knee pain, arm not functioning well. That closed some doors." Anthony made a similar comment: "It [military service] just pounded our bodies to the point where it becomes difficult for us to take on jobs that we might normally have done if we had not gone into the military" (journal entry). This finding serves to support the central premise of the career and entrepreneurship literatures with regard to why people with disabilities are motivated toward entrepreneurship as a career.

Our data suggest a second, more interesting type of push motivation that is less intuitive and manifests itself as a perceived limit

Table 2

Evidence of Career-Identity Foundation (Based in Coherent Narrative of Transition Necessitated by Traumatic Life Event)

Category of cases	Evidence (confirming)
Transitioning "well"	
Participant interviews	<p>"The pivotal turn for me was when my daughter was born. I realized real quick that it wasn't about me anymore . . . Things had to be fixed. There was no more drugs, no more stuff like that. I had to take care of someone. It wasn't an option."</p> <p>"You've got to have something that you're going for, something that you're shooting for. I think without that you're just going to be treading water in life and you'll be totally unhappy."</p> <p>"A lot of it was just looking inside myself and thinking through everything and facing it internally . . . My way was to come to terms with it was to sit down and say this is what."</p> <p>"I was unhappy with where I was at . . . I realized that this [moving forward with a career in entrepreneurship] is how we can set an example for our brothers and sisters in arms to follow."</p> <p>"It's just a matter of defining it, a matter of who you are, not lying to yourself. This is who I am and this is what I can do, and what I can't do, and move forward with it."</p>
Caregiver interviews	<p>"He understands why that happened to him and what he needs to do to overcome that."</p> <p>"Realizing why he may not have had the coping mechanisms that other people did . . . why he was more susceptible to PTSD than other people. I think as he's processed that, realized things he can learn."</p> <p>"I see it when he tries to help other people . . . how do we give back everything we've learned and everything we've gone through. I think in those ways he processes why it happened to him, what happened, and what led up to it."</p>
Other coded correspondence: (e.g., e-mails, progress reports)	<p>"Something occurred to me over this week back home. I've been passionate about everything I've talked about to anyone. I feel I can finally relate to who I am."</p> <p>"We can never relive an 'I should have done that' or 'What if I had done that.' I realized that if we can show some amount of success to other veterans like us, we will achieve more than for ourselves."</p>
	Evidence (disconfirming)
Transitioning "less well"	
Participant interviews	<p>"I guess I'm just not feeling like things are working out like they should. I mean, come on, this isn't the deal, right, broken-down body and no job."</p> <p>"It's hard to explain, but I'm not the same person I was before and people don't get that."</p> <p>"Yeah, you just say no, but I'm living, going forward. Yes it's dark, pitch black dark, but that's okay, there's no one there but me."</p> <p>"Probably a couple times a day I think about events leading to the injury . . . I can't shake it."</p> <p>"It was a life-changing event [being wounded]. You think about it every day."</p> <p>"How many guys my age do you know that have to walk with a cane? And I can't do a lot of what I used to . . . And I also lost time, I feel like missed a lot of time, like with my wife."</p>
Caregiver interviews	<p>"He is just so angry. That floored me, because that's not the person that I've known."</p> <p>"Well, what he did, and I didn't know it at the time, he used prescription medicine and that kind of stuff to sort of zone out and numb everything that goes on."</p> <p>"He just can't stop being that injured person and get better. He wants to fit in, but he gets angry very easily and that's . . . really hard for me. He gets so angry it's like almost judgmental."</p>
Other coded correspondence: (e.g., e-mails, progress reports)	<p>"Like, I just didn't want to be around people and s**t and I didn't have any patience. My wife tries to get me to talk sometimes, but I really just won't have it none of it."</p> <p>"Like somebody close to me, I won't talk to them because they knew me. I didn't know who I was anymore. I didn't want to hear you were a great person before and now you're miserable and you had these things wrong."</p>

Note. PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder. There was 93% initial categorization agreement between the authors in their coding; that is, for 93% of the segments of data, the two authors independently arrived at the same initial categorization.

to employment rooted in trauma, coping with trauma, and the termination of a highly valued career. We found considerable similarities across the cases with regard to the need for career-related autonomy, a condition that—in the participants' own words—closes the door to some vocations (push motivation—psychological). For example, in an interview, Aaron highlighted that it was following orders that almost got him killed: "I was almost close to death. I mean, [and] I was following orders; I was doing what I was told. And [now] I don't like not being in control; I don't like taking orders from people, and we all do in one form or another, but I want to minimize that as much as possible." Brad made a similar point in his journal when reflecting on working for someone else: "I just couldn't do it. I mean I have to be my own boss. I'm tired of taking orders and

having to depend on other people, and it's just like I want to have control finally." Bill also noted in a journal entry that "never again, never will I put myself in a position where my future and my family's future are in the hands of someone else. No way."

Although the convention when employing a multiple case study design is to focus on the explanatory power of differences across cases, we suggest that, in this instance, *commonality* across the two groups with regard to the need for autonomy derived from trauma and coping with trauma offers important insight into the process of career transition following trauma. This desire for flexibility and control as a push toward entrepreneurship might help explain why, in spite of significant improvements in disability accessibility and physical accommodations in the workplace over the past decade

Table 3
Motivation Toward Discontinuous Career Transition

Case	Push motivation (limits—physical)	Push motivation (limits—psychological)	Pull motivation (need for competence)	Pull motivation (need for security)	Pull motivation (passion)
Andrew	Present Example: "A year ago I thought it would be easier. I thought someone would say hey, you're a Marine; you should be able to do this The reality of it is it's exactly the opposite."	Present Example: "It's because I was a Marine for so long and that's the difference. I've done this and worse and I've dealt with so much crap If I was doing this, it would be a thousand times better."	Category A participants Present Example: "Personally, I think it's because I think everyone else is an idiot Why would I work for somebody who's going to do half the job?"	Absent	Present Example: "So when I grew up I decided I wanted to transfer to filmmaking and just be telling people stories I like communicating; it's just an inherent passion."
Aaron	Absent	Present Example: "I was almost close to death. I mean I was following orders, I was doing what I was told. And I don't like not being in control, I don't like taking orders from people."	Present Example: "I think that probably what made me believe it even in myself is that when I realized I had created something from nothing And I've got to see that grow."	Absent	Present Example: "I'm definitely passionate about it. It's tangible; it's real; I can see it; I can work with it; I create it; I love it Not that I'm a creative person, but there's just so many ways for me to do things."
AJ	Present Example: "Being a veteran, having certain disabilities is kind of time consuming at times. Like you got to go to the hospital, you've got to do certain things So being an entrepreneur frees that up a lot."	Present Example: "But back then it was like I didn't learn the way people thought I should. I didn't dress like they thought I should, I didn't make grades I translated all that into being entrepreneurial."	Present Example: "Like, you know when I'm walking down the road and I see a problem I fix it in my head People will call with problems, and I can solve them and that's what it's about."	Present Example: "I kind of feel like with my family, like my wife through that whole time with me, that I want to build success for them so she doesn't have to worry about it. That's what entrepreneurship does for us."	Present Example: "When I came back, I mean I've always had entrepreneurship as like, I always wanted to start my own business."
Alex	Absent	Present Example: "You know you have to set your own hours; you don't have someone to set a schedule for you."	Present Example: "I think if you if you get to a benchmark I think you should always try to give back to do something, some type of something to grow. Because if you are not moving at forward, you are not moving at all."	Absent	Absent
Anthony	Present Example: "Training and combat, it just pounded our bodies to the point where it becomes difficult for us to take on jobs that we might normally have done if we had not gone into the military."	Present Example: "Like being your own boss, that's what I want."	Present Example: "Being someone who can create, for society, it gives you a sense of satisfaction that I felt like I hadn't found anywhere else."	Absent	Present Example: "My experiences with other friends who also became disabled or died in the war instilled a passion in me . . . that radiates outward when I speak to other folks about what I'm about or what I'm selling." <i>(table continues)</i>

Table 3 (continued)

Case	Push motivation (limits—physical)	Push motivation (limits—psychological)	Pull motivation (need for competence)	Pull motivation (need for security)	Pull motivation (passion)
Brendan	Present Example: "Yeah, the physical stuff I live with it—back, knee pain, arm not functioning well. That closed some doors."	Present Example: "I like to be the one making the decisions . . . I would just rather work for myself than someone else."	Category B participants Present Example: "I've proven that I can make good decisions . . . I would just rather work for myself than someone else . . . I can just do it myself."	Present Example: "A man should be able to support his family. Support a family, send them to private school, put them in nice clothes, and take care of them."	Absent
Bart	Present Example: "But at least now, the opportunity of what it means to be an entrepreneur, that I create, or someone sees me, and here's my pitch, I created this, but they gave me the opportunity."	Present Example: "You have all your liberties, where all of your liberty comes, individual responsibility and accountability, you have to be self-initiating and self-starting, and that managing your time, yourself."	Present Example: "You can go as far as you want to go and as long as you want to go, and you can make a little bit of money, or based on you applying things that you been taught . . . It's now just up to you and how hard you work at it—not anybody else."	Present Example: "When . . . I feel, this is it, to take care of the needs of my family."	Absent
Bill	Present Example: "I am highly skilled, highly trained . . . and now because of what I went through to serve my country I can't be that guy anymore. It just can't be like that."	Present Example: "I need to be the boss . . . After all this, I've been so dependent on everybody else for everything. I need to feel like I have a say."	Present Example: "I want to have employees that I'm responsible for and like, you know, be able to help them do better for themselves."	Present Example: "I want to give my family a comfortable lifestyle."	Absent
Brad	Absent	Present Example: "Ah, I just couldn't do it, I mean I have to be my own boss, I'm tired of taking orders and having to depend on other people, and it's just like I want to have control finally."	Absent	Present Example: "I mean, everything I'm doing is for my family, and I think that's why I get so pissed off sometimes."	Absent
Bob	Present Example: "I can't work for somebody. If someone has to depend on me and I can't get out of bed because I have a severe headache . . . my head constantly hurts and there's days I have to stay in bed."	Present Example: "I mean, it's a different world when you're working for yourself. You have to take orders from somebody."	Present Example: "I have ability, and I think I'm doing something that will change the way people view it [my capabilities]."	Present Example: "When I retire in January of 2030, full retirement as an angel investor, and have millions of dollars . . . I can do whatever I want."	Absent

Note. There was 94% initial categorization agreement between the authors in their coding; that is, for 94% of the segments of data, the two authors independently arrived at the same initial categorization. Motivation data were compiled from all available data sources, including interviews, online journals, e-mails, progress reports, recommendations, and training program staff observations. Present: More than 3 references; Absent: 0–2 references.

(Batavia & Schriener, 2001), people with disabilities are more than twice as likely as the general population to be self-employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The desire for autonomy and control in response to trauma is manifest in our data as a barrier to future career options, closing the door to some career opportunities in the same way that physical limitations do.⁵

Our data suggest that those facing trauma-induced career transitions might be pushed to entrepreneurship as a function of perceived limits to career transition opportunities, but Table 3 also includes descriptions of three types of “pull” motivations that emerged from the data. These pull motivations toward self-employment represent a powerful desire by the participants to satisfy specific psychological needs that appear to stem from their trauma.

Most of the sample (nine of 10) described the need to feel competent (and to be perceived as competent by others) as fundamental to envisioning a future career path in response to the discontinuous nature of their transitions. Applying this notion in the context of entrepreneurship, they described the appeal of being perceived as someone who can create something from nothing (“being someone who can create, to society; it gives you a sense of satisfaction that I felt like I hadn’t found anywhere else” [Anthony; progress report]) or who can provide for employees (“I want to have employees that I’m responsible for and like, ya know, be able to help them do better for themselves” [Bill; interview]). Others described how they believed that “they could do it better” than others (Andrew) or that entrepreneurship is an opportunity to demonstrate that they have the skills and capabilities necessary to succeed (AJ, Brendan, and Bob). Thus, the need to feel competent was a consistent theme represented in our data.

Even more central to the story of progress toward a career transition in response to trauma are the two pull motivations that appear to distinguish those who were transitioning well from those who were transitioning less well: the need for security and an espoused passion and excitement focused on their emerging careers. Our data suggest that each of those categorized as transitioning less well focused on entrepreneurship as a career through which security could be found. For example, Brendan described the motivation for entrepreneurship in the context of being a good provider for his family: “A man should be able to support his family, support a family well, send them to private school, put them in nice clothes and take care of them. A lot of what I do is mainly for the future because I want to have a family that’s well taken care of” (e-mail; 47 weeks posttraining). Bart and Bill both wrote in their journals about taking care of their families as motivating their desire to become business owners, and Brendan described business ownership as a means to accumulate personal wealth to live a comfortable lifestyle (interview; 64 weeks posttraining). What the data suggest as a need for security goes deeper than seeking financial security and points to accommodating basic human needs, such as food for their families (Brendan and Bill) and shelter (Brad: “We are just one step away from being on the street. It just can’t come to that”; interview, 64 weeks posttraining). Such an emphasis on basic needs is consistent with a type of generativity described in the career literature (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Snarey, 1993), which argues that individuals are focused on securing the future for their families, specifically their children (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Although those categorized as transitioning less well talked and wrote about security as a motivation pulling them toward entrepreneurship, this type of pull motivation was virtually absent among those individuals who transitioned well. The only reference to security among the cases of those transitioning well to their new career came from AJ and is substantively distinct in nature from the attributions made by those transitioning less well. AJ did not write about providing for his family as a motivation; rather, his motivation centered on repaying a debt to his wife and children for helping him through his trauma. AJ wrote in an e-mail to the program director that “I kind of feel like with my family, like my wife, through that whole time with me, that I want to build success for them, so she doesn’t have to worry about it” (30 weeks posttraining).

Those who had not yet rebuilt their fundamental assumptions about the world and self were likely to feel that they and their families were highly vulnerable (Horowitz, 1986; Janoff-Bulman, 1992) because they lacked the set of beliefs that provides a sense of security (Beder, 2004–2005) and safety (Kauffman, 2002). This vulnerability narrowed their attention to obtaining security for survival (Reviere & Bakeman, 2001). As a result, those who were transitioning less well focused their new career on conferring security in the present; the data indicated that they were not in a position to develop a future orientation. As Bob noted, he was “just worrying about how to make ends meet and keep my family together” (progress report; 64 weeks posttraining). Perceptions of vulnerability focused attention on immediate outcomes that could quickly provide security in a world that appears malevolent, random, unjust, and uncontrollable. In contrast, individuals who had rebuilt their fundamental assumptions perceived the world as more benevolent and meaningful (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and, as a result, were likely to feel less vulnerable and thus focus less attention on obtaining immediate security.

A second pull motivation identified in the data is an espoused passion for entrepreneurship, which serves to distinguish participants based on their progress in their career transitions. For most (four of five) of those who have transitioned well toward constructing and executing new career paths in response to their trauma, passion is a central pull toward entrepreneurship. When Aaron reported on his business, for example, he wrote, “I’m definitely passionate about it. It’s tangible; it’s real; I can see it; I can work with it; I create it; I love it. There’s just so many ways for me to be—not that I’m a creative person, but there’s just so many ways for me to do things” (progress report). Similarly, Andrew noted that “I decided I wanted to transfer to filmmaking and just be telling people stories. It’s just like communication to people on a different level. I like communicating; it’s just an inherent passion . . . in particular just being creative” (progress report). In an interview, Anthony related his passion to his trauma

⁵ A complementary argument for this type of motivation can also be grounded in Ibarra’s (2003) notion of “negative possible selves” as informing career change; that is, given reflections on career options, those options for which the individual perceives continued dependence on others are likely to represent “negative possible selves” based on the participant’s experiences rooted in coping with a traumatic life event. This type of push motivation away from employment and toward an entrepreneurial career has been underexplored in the psychology, career, and entrepreneurship literatures.

experience and disability to describe how it impacts his business today:

I think with my service and disability and my experiences with other friends who also became disabled or died in the war instilled a passion in me, and in a way, it's something that keeps me going every day, and it also radiates outward when I speak to other folks about what I'm about or what I'm selling, so when they come into contact with me you know this is real, something that is tangible.

Those who have been able to rebuild their career-identity foundations focused less attention on career outcomes that provided immediate security against perceived threats; the data suggest that these individuals felt less constrained by the past (trauma) and the present (obstacles created by their disabilities) and have developed a more exploratory orientation toward the future. Rather than being elaborate plans for their lives, their pull motivations allowed their careers to emerge. That is, their careers are yet to be determined. This is in contrast to those who have progressed less well; these individuals feel that their futures are somewhat predetermined by their conditions and their situations are beyond their control. They still feel some helplessness, and they still feel they are on the same path facing insurmountable obstacles.

Trauma, Career Transition, and Competence Transference

Another distinction among the cases is the link between the past (recent and far) and the future in terms of transferring knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in one career context (e.g., military, coping) and effectively leveraging those competencies when transitioning into new careers. Cognitions to transfer career competences (knowledge, skills, and abilities) from past to present/future are relatively common in the career literature (Carless, 2005; Edwards, 1991; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Two types of competence transference emerged from the data that served to distinguish those transitioning well from those transitioning less well: (a) *career* competence transference, defined as linking knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired from a previous career to an emerging new career, and (b) *coping* competence transference, defined as linking knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired as a result of coping with a trauma to an emerging, new career.

In Table 4, we highlight our findings related to this transference. The data suggest that those transitioning well were able to create links between competences of the past and those required by the represent present and future. For example, prior to the training program, Aaron wrote in his journal that he was "starting from scratch" and that what he learned in the military was "a waste." However, when interviewed 16 months after the training program, he reflected on how learning to be disciplined in the military helped him in business: "Ultimately I think probably the biggest factor [learned from the military] is discipline, because I think you have to have discipline to be able to follow through with any of it. . . . If you don't have discipline it's not going to happen. I would just guess that if you look at some of the most successful people, it comes down to discipline." Andrew conveyed a similar realization. In his first posttraining progress report, he wrote that "I'm overwhelmed by what I don't know. The military didn't prepare me for this." However, in his third progress report (16 weeks later), he wrote, "I realized where I'm at right now is in a weird spot as

far as my peers. I'm ahead of my peers in resource management, life experience, risk management—all these things that happen to run a business. . . . So you have this wonderful business management experience by being in the military." Similarly, AJ described how the military instilled in him a sense of respect for others, which he sees as being central to success in his new career: "The Marine Corps taught me that, you know, not only do a lot of people respect you while you're in there, but it's another way too, as in the respect of other people. And so that's one of the things that has not really been difficult to me is [to] treat others as you want to be treated" (progress report; 80 weeks posttraining). In sum, those transitioning well made multiple and substantive references (moderate–high) to career competence transference.

The competency-based linkages between participants' past, present, and future in terms of the applicability of competences to participants' new careers appear to have emerged over time. For example, after working for many months to achieve his first sale, Andrew reported that "I understand so much more; I understand how hard it is, and the things they [entrepreneurs] have to go through. . . . And the Marines, we're the smallest; we have the lowest budget, and we do the best job. And I realized like, hey, I can do it. I don't work for anybody, I work for me" (progress report; 56 weeks posttraining). Similarly, AJ wrote that "it started last July, and now I'm here a year later. And, man, the past year has been this incredible learning, testing experience. . . . I would say number one maybe, it reinforces that the military does make us leaders" (progress report; 48 weeks posttraining).

Those transitioning well also exhibited a strong (high) proclivity toward linking the skills and knowledge they learned to their emerging career identities as entrepreneurs while coping with trauma. Like competence transference, these linkages appear to have emerged over time. For example, when interviewed, Andrew said his experience with coping with trauma made him realize his personal strengths: "One thing about having that confidence of 'I can do it on my own'—that was a big change in me. Too, I think [I] just [developed] more self-realization of who I am and where I'm at in life." Aaron came to a similar realization: "You know what? All that s**t that happened to me I would never take it back; I would never trade it. Not that I could go through it again, but I am what I am today because of the things that happened before" (e-mail; 64 weeks posttraining). AJ's powerful statement that follows highlights how linking the skills and knowledge the participants learned about themselves and others while coping with trauma emerged as they developed identity foundations for their new career. AJ said,

On my worst day, it doesn't matter—you could tell me that my office burned down and all the equipment is gone, and I'm not going to get an insurance reimbursement, and I'm in the hole \$50,000, and I could still say on that worst day that it's never any worse than it was back there [when coping with his trauma]. OK? I can't ever get back there, so there's always a spark of inspiration. (interview; 64 weeks posttraining)

Seeing the linkages between past and future competences provided these participants with the confidence that they would be successful in their career transitions. The data revealed that instead of passively assuming transference, individuals who were transitioning well focused their attention on the competences that they developed in the past and became aware of how these could be

Table 4
Competence Transference Facilitating Discontinuous Career Transition

Case	Career competence transference	Category A participants	Coping competence transference
Andrew	High Example: "I inadvertently, absolutely . . . I realized where I'm at right now is in a weird spot as far as my peers. I'm ahead of my peers in resource management, life experience, risk management—all these things that happen to run a business, you've already done. And not done like you've already taken a class but done as in you've done it on a daily basis, which is amazing. So you have this wonderful business management experience by being in the military."	High (4 references) Example: "One thing about having that confidence of I can do it on my own—that was a big change in me. Too, I think just more self-realization of who I am and where I'm at in life."	
Anthony	High Example: "You know, just thinking back on how I to function on very little sleep . . . staying focused on mission, understanding the bigger picture and strategy and tactics, knowing the importance of training and being prepared."	High Example: "I think with my service and disability and my experiences with other friends who also became disabled or died in the war instilled a passion in me, and in a way it's something that keeps me going every day . . . I know that I'm capable of anything I put my mind to and I'm disciplined."	
Alex	Moderate Example: "I guess the third thing would just be a work ethic, you know, because they say you have it, and I still to this day feel lazy, every single day, [in spite of the fact] that I'm working all day every day to achieve my goals."	High Example: "[Coping helped me] look at myself as business. I'm pulling together the resources available to make me an asset-producing entity, that's what I'm doing with myself. That's what you do to start a business."	
Aaron	High Example: "I've learned to be able to delegate responsibilities. I'd say being a leader in the military you learn that sense of delegation. It might be a little bit different tactic, where you're not barking orders at people now. That sort of thing doesn't fly over so well in the civilian world, but, I think that sense of leadership . . ."	High Example: "I think the confidence . . . You know what? All that s**t that happened to me I would never take it back; I would never trade it. Not that I could to go through it again, but I am what I am today because of the things that's happened before."	
AJ	Moderate Example: "The Marine Corps taught me that, you know, not only do a lot of people respect you while you're in there but it's another way too, as in the respect of other people. And so that's one of the things that has really been difficult to me is, treat others as you want to be treated, and it's not always easy to do that."	High Example: "Sure. On my worst day, it doesn't matter—you could tell me that my office burned down and all the equipment is gone, and I'm not going to get an insurance reimbursement, and I'm in the hole fifty grand, and I could still say on that worst day that it's never any worse that it was back there. OK? I can't ever get back there so, there's always a spark of inspiration."	
Brendan	Low Example: "We learn the ability to manage people, the ability to train, teach people. There are just a lot of different things."	Low Example: "I just want to put it all behind me, make it go away. It's my greatest regret."	
Bob	High Example: "You have the risk and the rewards, just like we do in the business world. And if the risk means there might be a reward you go for it. And in a war situation, different things are out of your control, but the risk is high for the reward sometimes."	High Example: "I'm a fighter—bottom line I'm a fighter. And I won't let anything get in the way anymore. Even if I did feel down, there was something inside that brought me out of it . . . Having a disability is like being an entrepreneur. If in that situation where you want to go through it, you have to go through the obstacle course."	

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Case	Career competence transference	Coping competence transference
Bart	Moderate <p>Example: "I learned that you have to apply yourself. But if you see, if you see challenging jobs, leadership and complexity, difficulty, responsible, accountability, the military and the military culture forces you to embrace the challenge, focus on a mission, make it number one . . . I did not realize that those skills would be transferable, transferable skills, but now that where I'm at, I realize that the significance of, all of that, particularly of social networking."</p>	Low <p>Example: "It has been so disheartening for me, the whole process. People have let me down at every stage, and what do I learn from that, really? It's not a lesson I want to embrace in my life."</p>
Bill	Low <p>Example: <i>Interviewer:</i> Did anything you learned in the military prepare you to be an entrepreneur? <i>Bill:</i> Nope. <i>Interviewer:</i> That simple? <i>Bill:</i> Yep, I mean you weren't taught to be an individual.</p>	Low <p>Example: "Well, I guess in terms of being my own man and having to realize that if I don't take some steps nobody is going to do it for me. . . . I think maybe that the life of an entrepreneur to, like you have to take the step and often it's just you, nobody else. So in that way, yeah I guess."</p>
Brad	Low <p>Example: "Nope. I mean, you have to do this on your own and the military doesn't train you to think like that."</p>	Low <p>Example: "I've been alone here, fighting the VA and the system, and I think that is what you need to be a good entrepreneur, like for financing and customers and even employees, you gotta do the work yourself and get people to believe in you and your idea, an island out there."</p>

Note. There was 96% initial categorization agreement between the authors in their coding; that is, for 96% of the segments of data, the two authors independently arrived at the same initial categorization. Competence transference data were compiled from all available data sources, including interviews, online journals, e-mails, progress reports, recommendations, and training program staff observations. High: More than 7 references; Moderate: 3–6 references; Low: 0–2 references.

used in the future. To do this, they conceived their previously developed competences at a more abstract level, more structurally, more generalizably, and more portably. For example, Andrew said, “I wouldn’t say there was anything specific on the surface [skills from the military useful for being an entrepreneur]. But stuff like resiliency and dealing with challenges and you know, things like that, which are—especially being an infantry Marine—those are things we dealt with every day” (interview; 64 weeks posttraining).

The data revealed that individuals transitioning less well cursorily dismissed transference because they held a low impression of the competences they developed in their prior careers and from their coping experiences, and they saw little similarity between their work roles of the past and those of the present and future. For example, when asked about how knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in the military might transfer to an entrepreneurship career, some of those categorized as transitioning less well were downright dismissive. Consider the following exchange with Bill 64 weeks after training.

Interviewer: Did anything you learn in the military prepare you to be an entrepreneur?

Bill: Nope.

Interviewer: That simple?

Bill: Yep. I mean, you weren’t taught to be an individual.

Brad had a similar response during the interview, saying, “Nope. I mean, you have to do this on your own, and the military doesn’t train you to think like that.” Others cited simple or nonsubstantive career competence linkages, such as following the rules (Brendan) or the relationship between risk and reward (Bob). Further, there was no evidence in the data that these attributions related to competence transference changed over time for those transitioning

less well. In terms of coping, two of the five made no references to coping transference in their interviews, journals, or other correspondence, and those who did (with one exception, Bob) gave negative responses. For example, Brad wrote in his journal that his coping experience taught him not to trust: “Don’t trust anyone. Everybody’s got an agenda, and no matter what they say, it’s not about you; you gotta do this yourself, man, and work the system for what you can get because they owe you. Don’t take any s**t.” More than six months later he wrote in an e-mail that “It has been so disheartening for me, the whole process. People have let me down at every stage, and what do I learn from that, really?”

Discussion

Arnold and Cohen (2008) asserted that focusing career research on how individuals fit into occupational roles and paths may be limiting, because it constrains investigations of the meaning that individuals place on their career paths. We believe that the cases considered in this study represent a powerful, confirmatory illustration of Arnold and Cohen’s important idea. The career transitions we investigated in this study are what we characterize as *discontinuous*, requiring individuals to engage in both (a) substantial personal development (i.e., reconstruct a foundational set of beliefs about the external world and self as the basis from which to envision a future career) and (b) substantial occupational role development (i.e., to construct a career that meets personal needs and to think structurally about competences gained in the past and those required in the present and future). Indeed, the discontinuous nature of the career transitions experienced by our sample illustrate the possible limitations of conceptualizing “career” based solely on how people come to fit occupational roles. In Figure 2, we illustrate our process model of discontinuous career transition

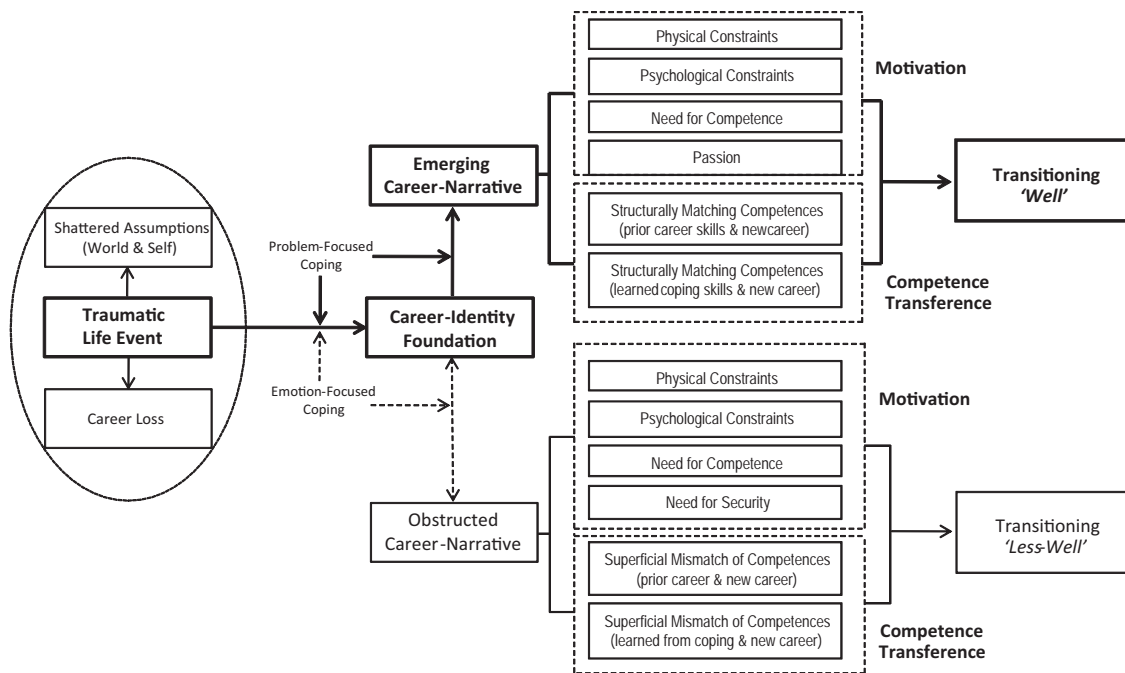


Figure 2. A process model of career transition necessitated by trauma.

arising from a traumatic life event that was inducted from the data. Before discussing the implications of the model further, we state its boundary conditions. First, the model is bounded by the traumatic origins of our participants' career transition. Second, the cases we investigated characterize individuals who had a strong, pretrauma identification with their work roles, organizations, and career paths. Finally, the nature of the trauma necessitated a discontinuous (rather than an incremental) career change. If we keep these boundary conditions in mind, the model provides some new insights into the mechanisms and processes important to understanding career transitions and provides numerous opportunities for future research (including those that extend the aforementioned boundary conditions). In what follows, we discuss the implications of this research for career research and suggest future research opportunities.

Implications for the Career Literature

First, the career literature has acknowledged that there is variation in the extent to which work transitions require individuals to adjust to new roles (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984). Nicholson presented four modes of adjustment: replication, absorption, determination, and exploration. Our theorizing is positioned within the exploration mode, primarily because the role to which the individuals are transitioning (an entrepreneurial career) is characterized both by high discretion and by high novelty of role demands. Rather than being thrust into a role of high discretion, each of the individuals chose an entrepreneurial career because it provided high discretion. Although the desire to alter the task content and context to suit one's needs may characterize many people who choose an entrepreneurial career, the individuals studied here were satisfied with their previous low-discretion careers; it was their injuries, and the recovery from those injuries, that created both the physical and the psychological need for a high-discretion career. Novelty of role demands involves the extent to which the new role (in an entrepreneurial career) is dissimilar to the previously occupied role (in the military). After the participants were discharged from the military because of their injuries, there initially appeared to be few (if any) aspects of their previous roles that were similar to their entrepreneurial roles. However, those who were able to reestablish fundamental assumptions of the world, others, and self (personal development) were able to make a deeper connection between the knowledge, skills, and habits gained while in the military (and coping with their injury) and the knowledge, skills, and habits required by their entrepreneurial roles. It appears that, because of the novelty and exploration mode of adjustment, these individuals engaged in sense making and career narrative development that provided a coherent personal story that could accommodate a traumatic discontinuity to the expected story line. Thereby, they were able to reestablish meaning in their careers and the belief they could be successful in it.

Second, much of the literature on career transitions emphasizes the sequential nature of work-role experiences over time (Latack & Dozier, 1986). These experiences become individuals' psychological basis for career growth and the subsequent satisfaction, self-esteem, and engagement (Hall & Foster, 1977). For the individuals in this study, we inducted from the data that trauma had shattered their fundamental assumptions of the world, forever breaking both the sequence of their work-role-related experiences and the orga-

nizational identification through which they found personal meaning and self-worth. Ibarra (1999) wrote that "researchers have long noted that identity changes accompany career transitions" (1999, p. 765). Career theorizing generally attributes changes in identity to "negotiated adaptation," where individuals adapt aspects of their identity to accommodate new role demands (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1987a). These perspectives assume that individuals follow a sequential model when transiting into new career and then engage in role development to accommodate the new skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for their new work roles, which, in turn, inform changes to their identities (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1987b).

Our data suggest that for those individuals engaged in a discontinuous transition necessitated by trauma, the process is different. We inducted from the data that individuals rebuilt a macro-narrative—a salient set of internalized and closely held beliefs and assumptions about the world, humanity, and self—as a necessary condition before they could successfully engage in role development. That is, before these individuals could effectively adopt, change, or create new work roles in a meaningful way, they had to reconstruct their conceptions of the world and self as a basis from which to engage in the role and personal development necessary for their discontinuous career transitions. In the context of explaining the model inducted from the data, we used the label of career-identity foundation to capture this salient set of internalized and closely held beliefs and assumptions. We suggest that this construct is positioned to focus future research on the relationship between identity, career transitions, and the meaning that individuals ascribe to work and thus represents a response to Arnold and Cohen's (2008) call to focus on change and individuals' development over time as a way to avoid both complacency and accepting unexplored assumptions in career research.

Therefore, the notion of exploration (Nicholson, 1984) and career and identity construction (Ibarra, 1999; Savickas, 2005) reflects a process of adaptation that involves the formation, translation, and implementation of an individual's self-concept and how this concept affects vocational behavior (Savickas, 1997; Savickas et al., 2009). We complement this notion of adaptation by offering a process model of career transitions necessitated by trauma: one that involves exploration (given high discretion and high novelty of role requirements; Nicholson, 1984) and an emerging career narrative, which can thus provide some insights into the notion of adaptation. For example, we offer career-identity foundation, structural competence transference, and pull motivation as mechanisms that help explain why some individuals adapt and others do not or are slow in doing so.

Third, these findings have implications for our understanding of the notion of protean careers. A protean career (vs. a traditional career) is "one in which the person, not the organization, is in charge, the core values are freedom and growth, and the main success criteria are subjective [psychological success] versus objective [position, salary]" (Hall, 2004, p. 4). All of our cases indicated that these individuals valued freedom and growth, but differences in the participants' motivations were apparent in terms of those who transitioned well being motivated more by subjective measures of success, such as doing something that they enjoyed and were passionate about, and those who transitioned less well being motivated by objective measures of success (i.e., financial security). It appears that those individuals who had not rebuilt their fundamental assumptions were not in a position to consider a

protean career.⁶ Therefore, the rebuilding of foundational assumptions (more or less) offers an explanation for why some individuals are motivated by security and others are motivated by passion. It is important to note that while the groups differed in some motivators, there was considerable commonality among others. These commonalities indicate recognition by those facing career transitions necessitated by trauma that there were substantial physical and psychological constraints to which careers they could and could not pursue; they did not feel that they were fully enabled or in control or that they had the options afforded by a boundaryless career environment.

Fourth, research on trauma has found that individuals who are able to rebuild their foundational assumptions develop a more coherent narrative of where they fit in the broader social context (Joseph & Linley, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), and as a result, they are able to see greater meaning in the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992). Rebuilding foundational assumptions grounds, secures, stabilizes, and orients these individuals to make sense of their environment (Beder, 2004–2005). They believe that cause-and-effect relationships exist between events and outcomes and that one is capable of achieving success (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992). These assumptions are likely to encourage individuals to look for and find relationships between events and outcomes that are not immediately obvious, such as the structural relationships that link past competences (from careers and coping) to those required by a new career. In contrast, those who have not yet rebuilt these foundational assumptions are more likely to believe that the world is not highly meaningful but is random, unjust, and uncontrollable; therefore, they are not confident that success is within their grasp (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992). Without foundational assumptions to ground their cognitions, these individuals remain disoriented and find it difficult to create a sense of reality, meaning, or purpose to life (Beder, 2004–2005; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This lack of belief and meaning and the resulting high levels of disorientation mean that those who have yet to establish their career-identity foundation are less likely to look for, find, and abstract relationships between constructs. The rebuilding of foundational assumptions (or not) offers an explanation for why some perceive a structural link for competence transference (career and coping) but others do not. This competence transference helps distinguish those who have transitioned well from those who have transitioned less well.

Fifth, the current study has implications for the life span perspective by creating an expanded orientation of the study of career responses to traumatic life events (Brim & Ryff, 1980). The traumatic events in our cases were not age related (Brim & Ryff, 1980), and the individuals experiencing these events were not psychologically prepared for them. In this paper, we explain how, under seemingly similar circumstances (previous career, organizational identification, traumatic injury, and the desire to be an entrepreneur), two distinct career transition patterns emerged. We offer a model inducted from data that details these two distinct paths. In doing so, we make a contribution to the life span literature by understanding why distinct patterns occur (Brim & Ryff, 1980) among a group of individuals who all faced a similar major change. The individuals in this study played an active role in determining the course of their posttrauma careers. Therefore, rather than focusing on how individuals fit into a career path, the

current study explored how individuals themselves developed (Savickas, 2002; see also Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Sixth, there is extensive literature on disability in the workplace, much of which highlights the organizational benefits of accommodating people with disabilities (Mannix & Neale, 2005). Further, public policy has increasingly mandated that organizations undertake all necessary and sufficient steps to make the modern workplace accessible and accommodating to people with disabilities (see Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2007). We would expect that, with such advancements, people with disabilities would no longer perceive barriers to traditional employment based on their disabilities (or at least they would perceive the barriers to be fewer and lower). However, it still appears that individuals with disabilities are drawn to careers outside of traditional employment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). So, as human resource professionals struggle to meet organizational goals with regard to hiring people with disabilities and policymakers remain frustrated by the fact that their best efforts do not appear to integrate people with disabilities fully into the mainstream workforce, people with disabilities continue to turn their backs on employment options in favor of self-employment. Our data revealed an important explanation for this apparent paradox. For those that become disabled (by trauma in our study), there is an initial (and perhaps ongoing) period of dependence on others that increases the psychological need for their future career to involve work-related autonomy and work-related competence. These psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000) are more easily satisfied through self-employment than through traditional employment (Douglas & Shepherd, 2000, 2002). Our data revealed that individuals with disabilities are motivated toward self employment not only because of physical obstacles to traditional employment (which appear to be diminishing) but also by psychological obstacles grounded in constrained autonomy and underutilized competences perceived to be representative of employment settings.

Finally, this study makes a contribution to a recent and important stream of career research on self-narratives, the stories people make about themselves (Linde, 1993) that help them to revise and reconstruct their identities during work transitions (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). This identity work for role transitions begins by drawing on narrative repertoires and then using feedback to revise these stories and repertoires to craft and negotiate new role identities (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). We extend this literature in two important ways. First, individuals who are forced into a work transition because of a traumatic event have their fundamental assumptions shattered; they do not have narrative repertoires upon which to draw in order to craft and negotiate their work identities. We find that these individuals develop a foundational story about the world, humanity, and themselves before they can successfully craft and negotiate a work identity. Second, the self-narrative stream of research has made a substantial contribution to explaining how individuals' work identities change to fit new roles (Ibarra, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Although this study found this personal development to fit

⁶ From a generativity perspective, those who were well adjusted had "productivity" tendencies, and those who were less well adjusted had "family nurturant" tendencies.

new roles, the individuals of this study also developed roles that fit their needs. They did so by thinking structurally about their competences (past, present, and future) with a passion for an envisioned, yet-to-be-determined future. Thus, we found that individuals facing a discontinuous career transition after a traumatic event need to (a) build foundational assumptions that can then be used to craft and negotiate a new work identity and (b) engage in identity work that involves developing both themselves and their future career.

Future Research

There are numerous opportunities for future research to investigate our model's assumptions, extend the model's boundary conditions, and test the relationships inducted from the data. First, a strength of the current study is that it represents an extreme circumstance. Each of the individuals was in the military and faced a trauma that was caused by violence inflicted by others, which led to a disability that terminated his career path and organizational identification. These conditions represent the bounds of the current model. Future research can unpack these important attributes of the sample and thus extend the model's boundary conditions. For example, such research could investigate the nature of the trauma (e.g., caused by another human being or self-inflicted accident) and the role of organizational identification before the traumatic event (the extent to which individuals identified with the organization) and after the traumatic event (e.g., individuals who were able to maintain organizational identification, albeit under a different work role, and those who were not). Such research will require a choice of sample that is different from the one used in the current study; that is, the sample should be heterogeneous in terms of the source of trauma, pretrauma organizational identification, and organizational opportunities for people with disabilities.

Second, another strength of the current study is the multiple sources of rich data over multiple points of time. Although we recognize that the limitations of retrospective interviews are somewhat alleviated by the convergence of multiple data sources (Yin, 2003a), a multiple case study approach is limited in its ability to test the causality of the relationships found in the data. We hope that along with additional multiple case studies, researchers use experiments and longitudinal research designs to test the relationships inducted from the data. Furthermore, we inducted causality in one direction from the data. Future research can investigate issues of causality, including reciprocal causality, feedback loops, and spirals. For example, there may be important feedback loops between an emerging career narrative and emerging assumptions of the world and self. For instance, just as accelerating psychological recovery may facilitate effective career transition, it is also likely that realizing success in career transitions may further accelerate psychological recovery from the trauma. In a related way, one can consider how attributes of the individual, such as prior educational experiences and length of time engaged in the pretrauma career, may impact psychological recovery from the trauma. Such future research can deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the model by using longitudinal designs to capture within- and between-individual differences over time.

Finally, on the basis of our findings we assumed that attempts to develop a micro-narrative of a new career without first establishing a more fundamental macro-narrative based on foundational beliefs

is a fruitless endeavor. Future research that further investigates this notion of a threshold of foundational beliefs is likely to make an important contribution to our understanding of discontinuous career transitions. Although there are numerous individual variables (e.g., personality, emotional intelligence, previous experiences with trauma), social variables (e.g., social support and/or professional psychological assistance), and environmental variables (e.g., the internal and external labor market) that are likely to be explanatory of discontinuous transitions, future research can further investigate our proposed role of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping in creating a path to an emerging career narrative or an obstructed career path, respectively. Longitudinal empirical research can follow individuals after they have experienced trauma, with mixed methods used to periodically capture their modes of coping (e.g., via an inventory approach, Ptacek, Smith, & Dodge, 1994, or a narrative approach, Folkman, Chesney, & Christopher-Richards, 1994), their fundamental assumptions (via existing measures; e.g., Dekel, Solomon, Eklit, & Ginzberg, 2004; Janoff-Buhlman, 1989), and their career narratives (via existing methods; e.g., Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007; Fine, 1996). Given a sample heterogeneous in career narratives (some emerging and some obstructed), future research can further test our proposed model by capturing the way individuals think about the similarities between their previous and future careers (e.g., Grégoire, Barr, & Shepherd, 2010; for a review, see Holyoak and Thagard, 1997) and the pushes and pulls of their current careers (e.g., entrepreneur's passion for work, Baum & Locke, 2004; for a review, see Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003).

Conclusion

Based on a multiple case study analysis of soldiers and Marines engaged in discontinuous career transitions necessitated by trauma, a model emerged that is positioned to provide insights into how such transitions are experienced and managed (Nicholson, 1984). Managing such transitions involves the enactment of behaviors focused on rebuilding career-identity foundations. Those who are able to reestablish assumptions of the world and self are better positioned to pursue their passion through their careers and structurally link their past (career competences and coping competences) with their future (competences required for a new career). In essence, they are able to manage a discontinuous career transition effectively. In contrast, individuals who have yet to establish these foundational assumptions continue to feel vulnerable to an unknown world. Therefore, they are more motivated by security and think more about the superficial mismatches between previous competences and those currently required for their new careers. Our model provides a number of new insights into the career literature that we hope will stimulate further theorizing and empirical research at the intersection of trauma, identity, and career transitions.

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