Stories of Courage Among Emerging Adults in Precarious Work

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Young precarious workers are increasingly exposed to forms of discrimination, inequality, and poverty; therefore, it is crucial to listen to their voices and increase their awareness of the characteristics of decent work. We examined stories of courage among 40 emerging adult precarious workers using a hybrid, qualitative approach involving a thematic analysis through which two independent researchers generated deductive and inductive codes. Our participants' stories of courage provide an account of the social and cultural costs of neoliberal development, revealing how systematic processes of privilege and discrimination influence emerging adults' experiences and courageous actions. The results highlight that precarious young workers do not experience dignified work conditions and may experience injustice and discrimination in work contexts. Our study has important theoretical and practical implications for research and practice and confirms narrative career counseling's value to investigate working conditions of today's youth.

Keywords: emerging adults, precarious work, youth unemployment, work courage, qualitative measure

Many factors contribute to the proliferation of unemployment rates and short-term contract options (Gutiérrez-Barbarrusa, 2016; Kesisoglou et al., 2016). Among these factors is the *neoliberal policy* that is shaping the global economy and is characterized by a frenetic increase in the liberalization of labor market institutions, the deregulation of markets, the consolidation of private property, and the reduction of the role of the state in the economy (Barnett, 2005; Beatini et al., 2015; Pickren, 2018). This policy has been the basis for the creation of consistent inequalities that concentrate immense wealth in the hands of few with multitudes of people living in conditions of unemployment and precariousness (Stiglitz, 2019).

The unemployment rate in the European Union rose from 7% in 2006 to 12% in 2016 (Nota et al., 2020). In Italy, in the same decade, the rate rose from 8% to 13.5%. Youth unemployment, which was 22% in Europe, increased in Italy from 16% in 2006 to 38% in 2016 for young people 18 to 25 years old. The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has had a massive impact on youth unemployment. According to Eurostat (2020) data, the unemployment rate for workers below the age of 25 jumped from about 8% in January 2020 to currently more than 25%. In contrast, youth unemployment in Italy declined during the crisis from about 28% to 23.5%. These data

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reflect that many young people simply stopped looking for work during the pandemic, particularly since the labor market situation was already difficult (Moebert, 2020). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) published the *World Employment and Social Outlook – Trend 2019* report, highlighting that just over half of global workers (52%) were waged and salaried employees. In many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, 40% of such jobs are informal (i.e., lack a written work contract) and are characterized by low pay and lack of social protection.

The proliferation of forms of precarious work has led to increased exposure to forms of discrimination, inequality, and higher poverty rates to such an extent that, in Italy, 61% of the poor are unemployed and 39% are working poor—that is, people who are in a state of extreme indigence while doing some work (Iannotta, 2017). Moreover, many informal workers are among the 55% of the global population who do not benefit from any social protection. The poor quality of many jobs is also revealed by the fact that, in 2018, more than one quarter of workers, including emerging adults (Tähtinen, 2019), in low- and middle-income countries were living in extreme or moderate poverty. In the past, most people who were in such conditions were older workers. Today, discrimination and inequality are inversely proportional to age. This suggests that a decrease in age means an increase in discriminatory and unequal work conditions (Tähtinen, 2019). The job crisis particularly penalizes young people who are in search of employment. In view of these current circumstances, we designed the present exploratory study to examine the effects precarious work conditions created by neoliberal policies might have on young adults' perceptions of work experiences and on precarious youth life design.

Precarious Employment as a Threat to Decent Work

Precarious employment is characterized by (a) insecurity regarding the continuity of the employment relationship; (b) insufficient wage or discriminant remuneration; (c) deterioration of the employment relationship and workers' vulnerability in terms of hours and work intensity, promotion, health, safety, and so forth; and (d) weakening of workers' social protection (Gutiérrez-Barbarrusa, 2016). The terms "precarious employment" or "precarious work" are often used to refer to all kinds of poor quality work. Such work includes insecure low-paid jobs, work with limited or no benefits (e.g., health care, pension, bonuses), unsafe or unhealthy workplaces, work in the informal economy, and work tied to no or inadequate access to training (Blustein et al., 2017).

A decent work deficit is considered as lack of physical and interpersonally safe working conditions, hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, organizational values that complement family and social values, adequate compensation, and access to adequate health. These work conditions do not benefit the worker with psychological purpose and do not fulfill the values and functions from their job (Duffy et al., 2018). Work conditions in the case of decent work deficit threaten the identity dimensions of continuity and belonging. In these contexts, workers often struggle with constructing plans because of their current and past experiences and often feel disconnected from others and the broader social fabric (Blustein et al., 2017).

Precarious work is also characterized by greater difficulties in formulating personal and professional plans and projects for one's future

(Luijkx & Wolbers, 2018). There is a higher likelihood that precarious workers and emerging adults are hired for low-skilled jobs, are paid lower wages, experience worse work conditions, have less information about their work environment, receive less training for performing their tasks, are seldom represented in health and safety committees, and have less access to safety equipment (Benach et al., 2014; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). These work conditions do not allow the establishment of a rich social network within the work context. Furthermore, precarious workers generally experience lower levels of social support and a greater tendency toward social isolation (Evans & Gibb, 2009).

Additionally, precarious work is associated with income inequality, occupational violence, and social or interpersonal discrimination, as in the case of workplace bullying (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). In general, precarious work creates a climate of rivalry when workers perceive colleagues as potential competitors for jobs. This may cause feelings of antagonism and suspicion that are generally related to workplace bullying (Alberti et al., 2013). Finally, job insecurity may generate a work environment in which antibullying policies are not considered necessary, resulting in unnoticed or unpunished acts of workplace bullying (De Cuyper et al., 2009).

Life Design to Support Young Precarious Workers

The life-design paradigm (Savickas et al., 2009) is a model and method for career counseling concerned with social and ethical values. It emphasizes the social justice mission (Guichard, 2018) of vocational guidance and career counseling because it focuses its attention on conditions of vulnerability, caring for people, and life contexts. In view of current, contextual socioeconomic threats, such as increasing injustice and inequality, life design stresses the need to consider trajectories that promote models of inclusion and sustainability that will enable people to recognize and combat discrimination, inequality, barriers, and exploitation (Guichard & Pouyaud, 2018; Nota & Soresi, 2018).

The life-design paradigm, which has its foundation in the epistemology of social constructionism, acknowledges that career development is highly contextualized and individualized. It emphasizes the strong interconnection among the various life spheres, underlining that career development is a dynamic interaction between a person and their environment. All life spheres relevant to an individual must be considered for the construction of career and life projects (Nota & Rossier, 2015; Savickas et al., 2009). Recently, scholars have used the life-design paradigm to emphasize the importance of building futures based on social justice in career and life interventions with the aim of achieving decent work and a decent life for everyone (Guichard, 2018; Nota et al., 2020). It is important to give voice to young precarious workers so that they can articulate the adverse conditions experienced and to make them aware of the fundamental characteristics of decent work.

The importance of access to work characterized by dignity is such a prominent issue that in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (G.A. Res. 70/1), which aims to achieve 17 sustainable development goals, including a goal relating to decent work. The agenda highlights

the imperative of placing concern for others and for sustainability at the core of the conceptualization of work by employers, policy makers, and every citizen of every country. In the field of life and career design, this involves completing the current generic question of work with principled questions—that is, those questions that introduce the topics of social justice and sustainability (Guichard, 2018). Career guidance must assume responsibility toward social justice; it is not merely about "helping" an individual, it is also about righting a wrong and bringing about a fairer society (Hooley et al., 2018). In this way, it may be important to support youth to reflect on their perspectives vis-à-vis their future career, to claim a right to decent work, to make the barriers public, to work together to face the current adverse conditions, and to promote positive resources to help individuals cope with these undesirable situations (Madžarević, 2016; Santilli et al., 2018).

Courage as a Resource

Precarious workers experience several barriers and challenging situations in the current job market. Courage can be considered a protective mechanism for coping with these threats and crises. Specifically, Watson (2003) emphasized that courage can be useful for making career decisions despite future-related fears, can promote advocacy toward individual and collective rights, and can lighten stressful work by helping to make young voices heard in work contexts. Moreover, Putman (2004, 2010) specified that courage can play an essential role in dealing with obstacles, challenges, and worries faced by people with vulnerabilities.

Courage is defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as a combination of strengths that promote "the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition internal and external" (p. 199). Specifically, courage represents the ability to act for a meaningful cause for oneself and for others, despite experiencing the fear associated with a perceived threat (Woodard, 2004).

Rate and colleagues (Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007) considered different types of courage in terms of risks and meaningful cause, identifying three different types of courage: physical, moral, and psychological. *Physical courage*, in which individuals voluntarily place themselves in physical danger, presents in situations where people physically expose themselves to prevent harm to someone else. *Moral courage*, which involves individuals standing up for their beliefs, is characterized in the social context by high risk, such as risk of exclusion and workplace bullying. *Psychological courage* is demonstrated when individuals voluntarily overcome emotional and psychological risks in order to achieve wellness and personal growth.

Even work contexts, as suggested by Detert and Bruno (2017), may require the implementation of courageous actions, especially to deal with *opposition* from the many employers that are inclined to frustrate and oppose attempts to attain decent work conditions (Hauf, 2015). Such actions might include publicly challenging bosses, criticizing the actions of a superior at work, reporting illegal or immoral behavior occurring inside an organization, disagreeing with the status quo, and otherwise pursuing a worthy cause that creates social disapproval. Furthermore, the work conditions of young precarious workers can be even more harmful because their most basic rights regarding professional life and decent

work are denied (Blustein et al., 2017) on the basis of their actual or perceived lack of alternatives (Lewis et al., 2015). These oppositions should be managed in line with moral and psychological courage (Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007). As a consequence, courage can be the resource that (a) brings out the negative conditions experienced by precarious workers, and their efforts to face them positively, and (b) gives life to a process of deepening and reflection upon decent work.

Stories of Courage

Many authors have focused on courageous life narratives to better understand the contextual and personal barriers people experience as well as the coping strategies people use to deal with such barriers (Clancy et al., 2015; Di Maggio et al., 2019; Tasker, 2002). For example, Clancy et al. (2015) analyzed narratives of older adults living in residential care and showed how their stories of courage provided specific knowledge about them and their circumstances. Moreover, Clancy et al. showed the importance of giving attention to the courage stories of older people, because it can help to protect their integrity and promote their well-being. In research involving people with vulnerabilities (e.g., substance use disorders, immigration), Di Maggio et al. (2019) similarly showed how stories of courage can be useful in understanding the contexts in which vulnerability takes shape. This approach allows researchers to analyze contextual and personal barriers that people with vulnerabilities may encounter.

Analyzing stories of courage also helps in identifying specific types of courage (physical, moral, and psychological) that people use to cope with barriers. These types of courage seem to be strictly connected to the contextual barriers encountered by people with vulnerabilities (Di Maggio et al., 2019). Furthermore, Di Maggio et al.'s (2019) results, in line with the studies of Clancy et al. (2015), show how stressing courage and giving people opportunity to tell their personal stories of courage can represent an essential resource to give dignity back to people with vulnerabilities. Telling stories of courage can (a) initiate consciousness-raising, (b) reduce the perceived weight of individual responsibilities, (c) develop strategies to let people hear from a professional point of view their own voices, and (d) encourage ways to reconsider their working and social conditions. This, in turn, as supported by Diemer and Hsieh (2008), helps people (a) develop critical consciousness regarding freedom; (b) recognize authoritarian tendencies; (c) empower imagination; (d) connect knowledge and truth to power; and (e) learn to read both the word and the world as parts of a broader struggle for agency, justice, and democracy.

Purpose of the Study

Emerging adult workers who experience precarious employment are exposed to the oppositions of work contexts, meritocratic, and competitive visions (Detert & Bruno, 2017) and have limited access to decent work conditions (Blustein et al., 2017; De Cuyper et al., 2009). Thus, with respect to the oppositions of the work contexts, we hypothesized that the stories of courage of young precarious workers could provide

an account of the social and cultural costs of neoliberal development, revealing how systematic processes of privilege and discrimination influence people's experiences. Specifically, we expected that precarious workers would more frequently tell stories related to work conditions that were, for example, discriminatory, exploitive, or demeaning or in which there was a negative relationship with bosses (Detert & Bruno, 2017; Lewis et al., 2015). With respect to the types of courage performed, we hypothesized that young precarious workers would more frequently refer to psychological and moral courage (Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007).

Method

Participants

Participants included 40 emerging adults who were engaged in precarious work with a temporary agency contract in clerical or catering fields and between the ages of 19 and 27 years (M = 23.48, SD = 3.24). All participants were of Italian origin and residents of northeastern Italy. Of the sample, 17 (42.5%) were men, and 23 (57.5%) were women. Among them, 10 people (25%) had a 3-year high school diploma, 14 (35%) had a 5-year high school diploma, and 16 (40%) had a bachelor's degree.

Measures

We developed and used a semistructured interview adapted from Pury et al. (2007). This format has been used in previous studies seeking to understand the type of courage related to the career stories of adults with vulnerability (Di Maggio et al., 2019; Pury et al., 2014; Rate et al., 2007). The interview is structured in three open-ended questions aimed at eliciting the story of courage through an operational, narrative language (e.g., "What is courage for you?").

The interview was introduced to the participants as follows:

> The purpose of the present interview is to better understand the experience of courage that people live in their work life. Nowadays, work life is often complicated and challenging. For this reason, it requires patience, perseverance, and courage. In your experience, have you ever been courageous? If yes, try to describe a challenging work situation during which you behaved courageously.

Participants described a work-life situation that they had faced courageously and explained where the event occurred, who else was involved, how they felt, what they thought, what the consequences were, and how other people behaved in that situation.

Procedure

We identified potential participants by contacting various career centers seeking individuals who met the following criteria: male or female, age range between 18 and 29 years, and in precarious employment. Once selected, participants were contacted by a career counselor, who explained the project's aim and informed them that collected information would be protected by professional confidentiality, following the ethical procedures outlined in the Italian Ethical Principles of Psychologists (Odine National Council for Psychologists, n.d.). The interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and were recorded with the participants' permission. To enable a

thematic analysis of the interview discussions, researchers who possessed a PhD with postdegree training in vocational guidance and career counseling transcribed the audio files. After participation in the study, all participants received a personalized report with the courageous actions that have allowed them to overcome barriers they had experienced. The report also described participants' strengths to stimulate the generalization process aimed at activating strategies for managing contextual situations that may represent barriers to human life and its development, as well as future planning. We also informed participants that with this study and through their voices, we would promote a public, scientific, and community debate about structural changes society might implement to reduce negative impacts of precarious work and generate work and worker equity, justice, and inclusion (Diemer et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

We conducted an analysis to identify the themes and the types of courage that emerged in the interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Our analysis comprised a qualitative method that is aimed at identifying, reporting, and analyzing data for the meanings produced in and by people, situations, and events (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Specifically, we chose a hybrid method of thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miller & Shifflet, 2016). Following this analysis, two independent researchers generated deductive and inductive codes. Using a top-down, deductive, theoretical process, we produced a set of a priori (or preempirical) codes that were derived from our research aims and from the questions we asked in the interviews. Our bottom-up, inductive, data-driven process resulted in a series of a posteriori (postempirical) codes derived from an examination of the generated data (Swain, 2018). The inductive codes were produced in order to help us understand the themes of stories regarding courage related to participants' life events.

During the inductive process, the first and the second authors coded the transcripts following the procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006). This included (a) becoming familiarized with the data; (b) coding; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) writing up an analysis of the data, with an introduction to establish the research hypotheses, aims, and approach. The first and second authors independently examined all responses to the interview questions, coded the responses, and searched for themes. The percentage of agreement between the two coders was over 95% for all codes. Then, the researchers worked together on revisiting and then naming and defining the themes. Deductive codes were produced to help us understand the type of courage related to participants' stories, based on the suggestion of Pury et al. (2014) and Rate et al. (2007). Specifically, we classified participants' responses as physical courage when the courageous behavior regarded physically dangerous events and the achievement of noble goals related to protecting themselves and others. We detected moral courage when participants' courageous behaviors regarded morally and/or socially dangerous events and the achievement of noble goals related to moral and ethical personal values. We classified psychological courage when the courageous behaviors regarded emotionally and/or psychologically dangerous events and the achievement of noble goals related to wellness and personal growth.

To determine the applicability and reliability of the codes generated, we applied them to several writing samples (Boyatzis, 1998). The range of Cohen's kappa interrater reliability index obtained was .85–.91. In the case of divergence in the classification, the researchers met with each other and tried to reach a consensus. Once the codes were revised to reflect the data set, they were applied to the full sample of data (Miller & Shifflet, 2016).

Results

The themes underlying the stories of courage were examined to identify the oppositions of the work contexts and type of courage (i.e., physical, moral, and psychological) reported by young precarious workers. Our analysis of the 40 stories of courage allowed us to identify two themes of opposition that involved actions performed in order to compete for jobs with undignified work situations and demands. See Table 1.

Opposition Themes

The first opposition theme concerned work conditions related to a deficit in decent work. This theme emerged in 72.5% ($n = 29$) of the stories of courage reported by participants. We identified four subthemes: (a) unacceptable work conditions or demands, in terms of time, place, and pay; (b) proposals for odd jobs and unfulfilled promises; (c) urgency without real reasons and requests to make future life decisions without having time to reflect; and (d) discriminatory conditions. Accurately, some participants ($n = 20$) reported unacceptable work condition requests in terms of time, place, and pay. For example, participants reported, "I call it exploitation because I was forced to work in the company without a contract. . . . I signed nothing, and I worked. . . . Facing all this, in my opinion, requires courage"; "We worked at night from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m."; and "She did not pay me, and so it started to get frustrating."

Five participants reported proposals for odd jobs and unfulfilled promises. For example, one participant stated,

> I have been courageous because I have tried a little bit of everything. . . . So, many times, I found myself doing odd jobs. . . . He made me do everything . . . and I did not have an "intellectual" return.

TABLE 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Courage Story Themes and Subthemes

Theme and Subtheme	*n*	%
Work conditions in the case of a decent work deficit	29	72.5
Unacceptable work conditions	20	50.0
Proposals for odd jobs and unfulfilled promises	5	12.5
Urgency without real reasons	5	12.5
Discriminatory conditions	4	10.0
Ways of conceiving the person and work	11	27.5
Self-entrepreneur	8	20.0
Work as competition	3	7.5

Note. All values are derived from the total of 40 stories.

Five participants reported situations in which they had to deal with urgent tasks without real reasons and with requests to make future life decisions without having time to reflect. For example, one participant reported, "I was called to work in Malta overnight . . . the departure would have been the following week." Another participant stated, "The agency called me to confirm that I was hired but called me on Tuesday telling me that the next day I had to start."

Finally, the other four participants reported facing discriminatory conditions in the workplace. For example, one participant stated, "I had to do a long interview, where I was evaluated in terms of personality, character, and everything. I felt violated. I felt like I was in the police station under interrogation." Another participant reported, "Once, in a bar where I worked for 4 months as a bartender, I met the owner who reminded me of the devil. He treated me like a slave."

The second opposition theme concerned ways of conceiving the person and the work. This theme described work conditions strictly related to neoliberal labor policies. It emerged in 27.5% ($n = 11$) of the stories of courage reported by participants. We identified two subthemes: self-entrepreneur and work as competition. The first subtheme ($n = 8$) was linked to the idea that individuals are responsible for their failures and successes. For example, one participant reported, "I think of when they told me I didn't have the right characteristics, even though I was qualified for the job, but I couldn't convince people, to introduce myself properly." A participant reported, "Only, sometimes I think it's not all my fault that I can't find a job, [and] that is not due to my characteristics, but to a global situation."

The second subtheme ($n = 3$) was related to the high level of competition. For example, one participant reported, "Courage to face the pressure they put on you . . . a ruthless competition for that position." Another participant asserted, "The competition is high, and there are more situations that discourage you than those that gratify you at this time, so doses of courage and perseverance are the fundamental recipes in the job search."

Types of Courage

No participant referred to courageous situations in terms of overcoming physical risks (physical courage). In 10% of the stories, moral courage emerged—that is, courageous actions implemented toward more powerful people that can involve social risks linked to exclusion, workplace bullying, etc. (Pury et al., 2007; Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007). For example, participants said, "I worked 8 hours a day without any kind of contract. I decided to face the situation and talk personally with my boss . . . in the end, she apologized and asked me to keep working with her with a regular contract"; and "I faced my boss asking him the possibility to deal with whatever was of my concern. . . . I had to insist a little bit but, in the end, he accepted."

Most of the stories (90%, $n = 36$) referred to psychological risks. In these stories, participants used courage mainly to face emotionally and psychologically dangerous situations. For example, one participant said,

> I've been courageous because I bit the bullet. . . . I forced myself to be polite and to keep calm. . . . I needed to work . . . I had to go on . . . this experience exhausted me on a psychological level.

Others said, "Fierce competition makes you believe that you are not up to them . . . trying requires courage because you feel hesitant and scared" and "I kept looking for a job even after several "nos." It took me a lot of courage because I questioned myself, I thought I wasn't able to find a job."

Discussion

The political shift in the economy has resulted in individuals living precarious lives and career practitioners having the mandate to reassert the right of individuals to have some control over their lives to be able to access a good life (Hooley et al., 2018). In our exploratory study, we sought to examine the implications that precarious work conditions created by neoliberal policies might have on individuals' perception of their work experiences and their future life-design endeavors. Specifically, we analyzed stories of courage of 40 emerging adult precarious workers using a qualitative methodology. The qualitative approach permitted investigating workplace risks and challenging situations experienced (opposition) by people that were often related to undignified working conditions—a topic that is of social importance but is poorly suited to quantitative methodology—and the types of courage that they use to cope with this (Lewis et al., 2015).

With respect to the oppositions of the work conditions, we identified two themes from the data. The first theme, which relates to work conditions in the case of a decent work deficit, aligns with the findings of Benach et al. (2014), Lewis et al. (2015), and Kalleberg and Vallas (2018). Our results confirmed that precarious young workers may not, in most cases, be experiencing decent work conditions. As Standing (2014) suggested, a core experience for such workers is the lack of voice, considered as "representation security" (ILO, 2002, p. 4), which thereby evokes considerable distress that has a substantial impact on one's capacity to manage survival needs and the psychosocial demands of contemporary life. The second theme was related to the requirements of the neoliberalist work context. Our results support those reported by Gordon (2011) about the emphasis of the neoliberal ideology on entrepreneurship and competition, which are considered as elements of hard work and personal success. Our results highlight that young precarious workers are involved in neoliberalist work contexts that can trigger in them a sense of failure and reduced self-confidence and self-esteem (Bobek & Robbins, 2005).

With these results in mind, career counselors may help precarious young workers develop a critical consciousness that helps them to identify a preoccupation that is a cognitive schema for interpreting the diverse experiences and help them to construct an occupation that actualizes this meaning (Diemer et al., 2016; Savickas, 2013). In working with emerging adults engaged in precarious work, career counselors can help them design inclusive and sustainable life projects, making career decisions about the future related to decent working conditions that guarantee equality and respect for human dignity (Duffy et al., 2018). With respect to the types of courage, it emerged from our study that almost all of the stories of courage reported psychologically risky actions aimed at facing a sense of frustration and of mistrust toward oneself

and the context that surrounds the worker. These psychological courage actions allow the person to recognize, considering the real or perceived lack of possible alternatives (Lewis et al., 2015), the internal benefits linked to their ability to resist adverse situations. On the other hand, these same actions do not seem to entail the person's internal benefits related to personal growth (Rate, 2010; Rate et al., 2007). It seems that, for these people, psychological courage can help them to feel that, despite everything, events might not be completely overwhelming. Moreover, it helps them to foster the idea to be able to give life to a qualitative life change and also to perceive that they were able to improve, develop, and grow.

The lower frequency of stories of courage referring to moral courage may be explained by the fact that social rejection risks, typical of moral courage (Pury et al., 2007), could discourage precarious workers from performing this type of courage given their perception that they do not have many options in the job market (Lewis et al., 2015).

The voices of young precarious workers in our study allows us to highlight how different types of courage can vary depending on the context and the group of people involved. For example, the type of psychological courage that does not involve personal growth has not emerged in previous studies that examined the different kinds of courage in people with a story of addiction to substance use (Di Maggio et al., 2019). Courage tends to be connected to contexts and experiences: It can help us bring out every individual's uniqueness and focus the intervention on the specific situation, in addition to the person's characteristics.

Therefore, our findings have both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theoretical implications, first, in line with the life-design paradigm, the results confirm the importance of examining, through autobiographical and reflexive processes, the career themes that emerge from the stories of young precarious workers, to investigate injustice and discrimination in the current work context. Second, our study suggests that career narratives, and specifically stories of courage, are deeply contextually embedded and represent a recursive interaction between people, their work contexts, and the breadth of the sociopolitical system that influences individual work experiences (Di Maggio et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2012). Third, our study seems to suggest that the work conditions young precarious workers experience in the current work context may be the result of current neoliberal labor policies (Gordon, 2011). Specifically, as underlined in this research, inviting participants to tell a story of courage experienced during their work-life proved to be a useful technique.

In terms of practical implications, we demonstrated the importance of assisting precarious workers in giving voice to how they experienced and successfully handled undignified work conditions. Specifically, career counselors can help clients to recognize external and contextual influences that affect their career stories in terms of the broad sociopolitical system in which they live. In line with the life-design paradigm, it could be useful in counseling sessions to propose stories of courage to support people in identifying and recognizing situations in which they have used (or others have used) courage. All of this could motivate people to face risks in their work contexts. Moreover, in line with Toporek and

Cohen (2017), the analysis of these positive stories of courage could be instrumental in career counseling sessions to help people build a positive self-image and increase their self-esteem.

Furthermore, career practitioners are invited to increase awareness in their clients regarding the fundamental characteristics of decent work and empower them to claim a right to it and to behave with the moral courage to handle discriminatory conditions and take action to protect not just their own interests but also the coworkers' rights and, in particular, the rights of the most vulnerable individuals (Di Maggio et al., 2019). In this way, career guidance could nourish and contribute to democracy and increase hope, particularly for people living in marginal conditions, to support them to change their living circumstances and their future paths (Ginevra et al., 2021).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study was conducted with a small group of young precarious workers. Future studies should involve a larger sample and consider and analyze the role of other demographic variables, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and income, on their stories of courage. Moreover, we used narrative methods only. In future studies, it could be useful to accompany the use of narrative methods with self-report instruments and direct observation of the contexts and variables considered in this study. Finally, as suggested by Hooley et al. (2018), in future research, it would be worthwhile to study this topic with a broader vision, considering the problem at two levels: local and global.

Conclusion

Our study has advanced existing research on precarious employment, analyzing the stories of courage experienced in work contexts. The results obtained highlight that young precarious workers can experience undignified work conditions and may find themselves in neoliberalist work contexts and perform actions to face threats concerning personal well-being and psychological stability (psychological courage). Our study supports use of narrative procedures in career counseling as a useful instrument to give voice to injustice and discrimination that young precarious workers face in the current work context.

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