A Qualitative Analysis of
Counseling Case Material:
Listening to Our Clients

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In this article, the case vignettes and discussants' reactions from the series entitled "Getting Down to Cases" from the Career Development Quarterly *were analyzed to identify themes pertaining to the overlap between work and interpersonal relationships. The most common theme, which was found in more than 50% of the cases, was the expression of interest on the part of the discussants for further information on the relationship lives of the clients. Other variant themes (i.e., themes that were identified in less than 50% but more than two of the cases) identified four areas pertaining to (a) the function of relational support in career development, (b) the motivational and conflictual nature of the work-relationship overlap, (c) the complexity of family roles in career decision making and work-based settings, and (d) the social and economic influences of the work/relationship interface. These findings were discussed in light of current theory and research.*

One of the major innovations in the past decade of career development research and practice has been the exploration of the relationships between career counseling and psychotherapy (Blustein, 2001 [this issue]; Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Hackett, 1993; Savickas, 1995; Subich, 1993; Swanson, 1995). An outgrowth of this movement has been an emerging interest in the

way in which work and relationship issues intersect and overlap (Flum, in press; Hall, 1996; Richardson, 1993, 1996; Spengler, Blustein, & Strohmer, 1990). A particularly promising trend in this line of inquiry has been the acknowledgment that work-related issues are closely linked to functioning within the interpersonal relationship domain across the life span (Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Hall, 1996; Richardson, 1996). The research reported in this article is directed toward further exploring the interface between work and relational functioning in the realm of career counseling interventions. In this study, we examine the input of clients and counselors via the discourse of counseling-based narratives. Thus, rather than demonstrating that work and interpersonal issues are interrelated, we seek to describe the nature of their intersection. Following the theory-building tradition of discovery-oriented methods (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we have sought to use the knowledge generated by clients and counselors that is available in case material from an established body of career intervention literature.

As the source of data for this project, we reviewed the "Getting Down to Cases" (GDTC) section of the *Career Development Quarterly* (*CDQ*), which includes 19 separate contributions between 1986 and 1993. The case material in the GDTC section represents the sort of purposive sampling that is detailed in the qualitative literature as a primary means of generating new ideas and knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The GDTC section typically began with a narrative description of a career-oriented counseling case followed by the reactions of two or three practitioners or scholars. The case vignettes ranged in content from career indecision to the complex adjustment necessitated by disabling conditions. It is important at the outset of this article to state that our intention in this project is not to critique how these cases were analyzed. Rather, given the prominence of *CDQ* as the major career counseling journal in the United States, we propose that these cases reflect a state-of-the-art portrayal of the way in which career counseling has been conceptualized and implemented during the latter 1980s and early 1990s. In our view, these cases reflect highly contemporary work-related issues, despite the fact that most were written over a decade ago, that still form the basis for much of the work of practitioners. See, for example, Gysbers, Heppner, and Johnston, 1998; Swanson and Fouad, 1999. A careful review of the GDTC section indicates that the case material is sophisticated, ethical, and carefully constructed. As such, we view the GDTC vignettes as a valuable source of qualitative data in our search for new ideas about the way in which work and nonwork roles intersect. In this article, the work/relationship interface represents a shared psychological space in which work and interpersonal or intrapersonal relationship issues overlap in a way that influences an individual's functioning in either domain. For example, work /relationship issues

may be manifested in an individual wanting to leave a job because of relationship problems in the workplace. Although it is possible to generate other examples, the level of knowledge that exists in this area of inquiry is quite limited; hence, one of the goals of this project is to continue mapping this psychological terrain.

The existing literature has detailed logical relationships between psychosocial functioning and work-related functioning in a number of domains, as summarized in the introduction to this Major Contribution (Blustein, 2001). For example, some modest empirical research has been directed toward delineating the interplay of work and nonwork domains. In a review of this literature, Blustein and Spengler (1995) cited numerous studies supporting the assumption of an interdependence between work and nonwork functioning. However, they concluded that it would be too simplistic to assume that work and nonwork roles "function in unison at all times" (p. 302). In addition, a few well-designed studies have demonstrated that career counseling and psychotherapy contain many of the same change processes (e.g., Heppner & Hendricks, 1995; Kirschner, Hoffman, & Hill, 1994).

In a similar vein, a number of scholars and practitioners have used family systems theory to describe how work and nonwork roles intersect (e.g., Chusid & Cochran, 1989). One particularly compelling idea is that the roles that individuals adopt within their families are often reenacted within the pre-implementation and post-implementation phases of career development (Lopez & Andrews, 1987; Piotrkowski, 1979; Ulrich & Dunne, 1986). In a series of innovative, qualitatively based studies by Cochran and his associates, the complex interrelationships between the roles adopted by individuals in their families of origin and in the workplace have been described (e.g., Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Zimmerman & Cochran, 1993). In sum, the family systems perspective provides some important ideas and a viable epistemology for examining how work and nonwork roles intersect throughout various life domains and stages (Patton & McMahon, 1999). However, as Blustein (2001) argued, the domains of the work/relationships interface that have been explored to date are quite circumscribed given the broad array of relational dimensions that have been detailed in the literature (e.g., Cutrona, 1986; Josselson, 1992; Weiss, 1974).

A review of psychotherapy case material (see, for example, Yalom, 1989, 1995) reveals that the primary overt domain that clients present in sessions seems to be in the realm of human relationships. In fact, a number of important models of psychotherapy intervention have been designed based on the assumption that many life struggles emanate from difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Klerman & Weissman, 1993; Sullivan, 1953; Teyber, 1997; Yalom, 1995). Yet, despite this clear focus on interpersonal relationships and intrapsychic conditions, one particularly compelling nexus of human

experience lies at the junction between work and relational functioning (Axelrod, 1999; Blustein, 1987; Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Socarides & Kramer, 1997). The relative absence of attention to the interface of work and relationship issues in psychological theory and research is particularly problematic when one considers the vast amounts of time and attention that work-related issues demand in contemporary society (Blustein, 2001; Sennett, 1998). Given the important role that work and human relationships have in overall psychological functioning (Erikson, 1968; Savickas, 1991), we are directing our inquiry in this study toward the intersection of work and relational functioning in the *CDQ* cases. To guide our efforts, we defined work-based functioning as any material that mentions jobs, occupations, careers, career decision making, and work-related issues (including problems and decisions about work). Relational functioning refers to any material that describes interpersonal relationships, encompassing relationships with significant others, coworkers, friends, family members, and one's family of origin.

Growing out of the awareness that work and nonwork roles are meaningfully related, we propose that counseling researchers and theorists need to develop knowledge to guide the integrative interventions that will likely define psychological practice in the next century. As Blustein (2001) proposed, a confluence of social and occupational forces is creating a need for truly integrative theory and treatments. For example, in the relationship domain, we are witnessing (and in many cases experiencing) increasing diversity in social roles, less stability in long-term relationships, and necessary and often unpredictable shifts in geographic location that leave individuals without available or accessible social support (Josselson, 1992). In the vocational domain, work is being recast as individuals and their employers are negotiating ever-changing relationships in a labor market that is characterized by change and uncertainty (Sennett, 1998). In response to these needs, we believe that new ideas are needed to generate high-quality research and interventions. This study has been designed to (a) explore the current status of the work-relationship intersection in the realm of career counseling narratives, and (b) generate new directions for research from the voices of clients and counselors.

METHOD

Case Material

The data for this study were derived directly from the 19 GDTC entries that were included in the *CDQ* from 1986 to 1993. These 19 cases represent a wide array of career-related issues ranging from dual-career concerns, adjust-

ments to disabling conditions, job loss, and career indecision. Although the format of the GDTC section varied somewhat over the 7-year period in which this material was published, the cases contain a number of consistent features. Each entry began with an overview of the case (including history, presenting issues, and course of treatment) followed by comments from two to three discussants, typically other practitioners or scholars with considerable skills and knowledge of career intervention.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The methodological framework that we have adopted in this project is based on the philosophical perspectives of naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and the more specific guidelines articulated by Hill et al. (1997) in their consensual qualitative research (CQR) method. Following the guidelines of contemporary qualitative research, we have integrated the aforementioned qualitative methods in a manner yielding both relevance and rigor.

The primary goal of our inquiry was to identify passages in which work and nonwork issues intersect. Once we located these passages, the research team then sought to describe the major themes embedded in the passage. Following the Hill et al. (1997) framework, we have identified typical findings (i.e., those that occur in more than half of the cases) and variant findings (i.e., those that occur in less than half but in more than two of the cases). Initially, the first author selected a team of six doctoral students who have had some academic and/or applied experience in career counseling and psychotherapy to function as coauthors and judges. Because the team represents a critical instrument in a study such as this one, we believe that it would be useful to furnish a brief description of our academic background and theoretical orientations. The members of the research team consisted of doctoral students in an American Psychological Association (APA)-approved Ph.D. program in counseling psychology, ranging from 2nd-year to 6th-year students. The team included one man and five women, ranging in ages from 26 to 40; their ethnicity represented a diverse array of European American backgrounds and the social class of their families of origin ranged from working class to upper middle class. In general, the doctoral students endorse a view that affirms the utility of integrating career and personal counseling in cases where such a synthesis is warranted. Their theoretical orientations fall generally within developmental and relationally oriented psychodynamic perspectives, with some of the team maintaining interests in systemic and cognitive-behavioral theories. The team approaches career counseling from a developmental perspective and to a lesser extent, person-environment theories (Super, 1980; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). The senior author, a 46-year-old European

American counseling psychologist, maintains similar views as the team with a growing interest in social constructionist perspectives.

Once the team was selected, a series of meetings was held wherein the objectives of the study were presented and revised to reflect the team approach that defines our mode of inquiry. In defining the objectives of the study, the senior author introduced the team to the conceptual ideas that have guided this line of work to date (e.g., Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Hall, 1996; Richardson, 1993, 1996; Savickas, 1991, 1995). Once the objectives were defined, the research team broke into two separate groups, each of which reviewed the cases and then developed consensually agreed-upon inferences based on the narrative material. The major goal of the qualitative analyses was to identify any portion of text from the case narrative and from the counselor/discussant comments that described the overlap or connection between work and relational functioning using the definitions that we furnished in the introduction. To guide the analysis of the narrative data, a coding sheet was developed that allowed the raters to summarize observations about a given case. The sheet listed a wide array of possible relationship figures including mother, father, brother, sister, spouse, significant other, work mentor, teachers, counselors, and work supervisor. The rater then was able to indicate the following information about the relationship figure: supportive, inhibiting, neutral, requested more information about relationships, suggested supportive interventions, and suggested ways of mitigating strain.

Each rater within a given subgroup read each of the 19 cases, using the guidelines described previously. After reading all of the cases, the subgroups met independently to review their observations and to develop inferences about the interface of work and relational functioning. Following the review of all of the cases, the two groups combined to merge their results. The intention at this juncture was to develop a consensus with respect to the inferences that were derived from the data.

Following the development of mutually agreed-upon inferences, we then used an auditor to review our methods and decisions. (The auditor has a master's degree in community counseling and is currently a doctoral student in developmental psychology. His theoretical approaches were similar to the major orientations of the original team.) The auditor, who had not been involved in any of the prior meetings, reviewed each of the cases and the methodology used by the team. He then assessed the logic of the inferences, going back to the raw data to ascertain that the actual content was consistent with the inferences that we developed. Finally, the senior author served as a second-level auditor, albeit with ongoing awareness of the study's objectives and preliminary findings. The audit check resulted in no major changes; however, some minor fine-tuning was done to the inferences at this stage of the data analysis. The fact that the audit trail revealed a highly stable and inter-

nally consistent set of findings enhances our confidence in our results. Thus, we believe that we have established a method of data collection and analysis that is rigorous, systematic, and consistent with the best practices within qualitative research (Hill et al., 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

As we have indicated, we are employing the guidelines articulated by Hill et al. (1997) regarding the representativeness of the results. First, we present the more typical findings that include themes and patterns that were evident in 50% or more of the *CDQ* articles. Second, we present the variant findings that reflect themes and patterns that were found in less than 50% but more than two of the cases.

Typical Findings

There were no major or highly prevalent thematic trends in the actual case descriptions that occurred in 50% or more of the cases. However, one major theme was prevalent in the responses of the counselors and discussants; specifically, we observed a significant tendency on the part of the discussants to request more information about the family and relational space around the client than was provided in the GDTC vignette. The comment about the need for further information was typically directed at the case vignette, suggesting that the initial presentation of the case may have neglected potentially important relational dimensions.

Variant Findings

Because our investigation is based on a discovery-oriented framework, we also have elected to report some promising inferences that were reflected in more than two of the cases but not more than 50% of the cases (Hill et al., 1997). These inferences, although exploratory in nature, provide some fruitful ideas for further research and theoretical innovation. (The cases that furnish supportive findings for these inferences are indicated in parentheses after each proposition.) In addition, we include several illustrative vignettes from the GDTC section of *CDQ* for each of the subsections that follow. (We have added minor clarifying points in the vignettes that are placed within brackets. We also provide information about the ethnic and racial background of the client along with relevant demographic information, where available. Because these cases are part of the public record from *CDQ*, we

urge interested readers to review the relevant case material in depth to further their impressions of our findings.) The four categories that we identified are presented next in conjunction with narrative examples of each theme. In addition, the major inferences derived from the variant findings are summarized in Table 1 along with the proportion of cases in which a given inference was identified.

Relational support. One of the more prevalent variant findings is the observation that relational support is helpful and potentially facilitative of progress in career development. Relational support refers to the provision of emotional assistance, which is manifested by affirmation, nurturing, and personal strength. Additionally, we define relational support in this study as including direct instrumental assistance to others, which is evident in information dissemination and the provision of financial and other forms of concrete assistance, which are particularly helpful in times of stress (Josselson, 1992; Weiss, 1974). The observation of relational support playing a key role in the work realm is consistent with considerable research and theory (e.g., Patton & McMahon, 1999; Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001 [this issue]; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001 [this issue]). The following vignettes best capture relational support.

Case of Felisha. (Felisha is a 20-year-old African American college sophomore from an economically disadvantaged background, presenting with academic major and career indecision.) Felisha remembers the support and encouragement her mother received from her parents and wants to make her mother proud. There seem to be several important sources of motivation and strength for her. She seems to come from a supportive family that has a solid work ethic. Felisha indicates that her mother's efforts on behalf of herself and the family have strongly motivated her to attend college.

Case of Harry. (Harry is a 25-year-old European American who worked at a laundromat; he was asked to take a promotion or seek employment elsewhere.) Harry has a close relationship with an uncle, Bill, who is an accountant. Bill often talks with Harry and encourages him to begin some type of entrepreneurial business. Cathy (his fiancée) is clearly a source of emotional support and nurturance for Harry, yet the impending responsibilities of a long-term relationship and marriage are both frightening and overwhelming.

Case of Justin. (Justin is a 29-year-old European American doctoral student in chemistry. He presents with doubts about his chosen field with the goal of reevaluating this career plan.) Through all of his cross-country moves,

TABLE 1:   Distribution of Variant Themes

Variant Theme	Number of Cases	Percent of Cases
Relational support:		
Interpersonal relationships provide emotional and instrumental support in career development.	8	42
Lack of familial and partner support can be detrimental to career development.	3	18
Counselors and support groups can facilitate career exploration and growth.	4	21
Motivational and conflictual themes:		
Peers can often serve as a career "yardstick," suggesting what we can achieve or desire to avoid.	3	18
Significant others can function as external motivators for career development by helping individuals to face difficult career dilemmas.	6	32
Competition between siblings can both foster and inhibit career development.	4	21
Recipes for the integration of love and work may be difficult to establish in a changing context, affecting both relational and work experiences.	3	18
Recapitulation of family roles:		
Family issues can be recapitulated in career decision making and in the workplace.	3	18
Social and economic frame:		
Family obligations can contribute to remaining in an unsatisfying job, remaining underemployed, and/or limiting one's career dreams.	4	21
Social support and role models can help marginalized individuals navigate the obstacles that exist in their career development.	5	26

Justin has not maintained very close contact with his family or friends; therefore, he does not have a large support network. His wife is supportive but sometimes demands that he "get his act together." At this point in his life, Justin feels that he has invested a great deal of time and energy working toward a goal (scientific research) that may be unachievable. He seems at a loss about what to do next and has little information about the opportunities that might be available to him.

As these vignettes convey, the relational frame that surrounds individuals clearly has the potential of playing a key role in facilitating career development progress and adjustment. The brief vignettes from the cases of Harry and Felisha portray the possible role of close relationships as fostering the type of exploration and risk taking that is associated with adaptive career development (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995). In addition, the case of Justin supports this hypothesis in a reciprocal manner in that a lack of support is associated with difficulties in resolving a career decision-making dilemma. The following inferences summarize our observations about the nature of relational support in the GDTC vignettes:

- Relationships with parents, significant others, and friends provide emotional and instrumental support for individuals coping with various career development tasks (Felisha, Dean, Jackie/Jack, Justin, Fabian, Rhonda, Harry, Allan).
- Lack of familial and partner support can be detrimental to career development (Justin, Jack/Jackie, Rosie).
- Relationships with counselors and support groups or counseling groups can facilitate career exploration and growth (Melvin, Jessie, Allan, Publican, Fabian).

The motivational and conflictual nature of the work-relationship overlap. One important theme that emerged in our analysis pertained to the way in which relationship conflicts and tension functioned to motivate or inhibit career progress and related work tasks. The following examples offer an insightful view of how conflictual or discrepant relationships serve to influence various aspects of pre-implementation (prior to the start of one's work life) and post-implementation (after the start of one's work life) career behavior:

Case of Felisha. The friends Felisha left behind in the city (i.e., in the urban housing projects) provide an important source of motivation for her. Their lack of employment or chronic underemployment serves as an impetus for Felisha to finish her college degree.

Case of Rachel. (Rachel is a 28-year-old college graduate with a degree in art education who lost interest in teaching.) Rachel chose to move back home with her parents. She found living at home to be difficult, though. Her parents pressed her to find a teaching position, expecting independence following college graduation. Another influential factor was her relationship with a 38-year-old graduate student at the university. She feared that accepting a teaching position would take her away from him and would jeopardize their relationship.

Case of Randall. (Randall is a 28-year-old European American who experienced a profound head injury that ended his hopes of pursuing a career in engineering. He was in an auto accident when he was 21 that resulted in considerable cognitive deficits. The career counseling that he was pursuing was directed toward helping him to obtain full-time employment that would be satisfying and financially rewarding.) Randall stated that he and his sister had always been competitive, and it was difficult now that she was married and had a career. She had what he desperately wanted.

The *CDQ* material in this section suggests that the competitive and comparative aspects of interpersonal relationships may influence the direction and progress of selected career decisions. In a sense, these vignettes suggest that the nature of relational influences in the work domain is highly varied and may be complicated by the ambivalence that often characterizes close relationships. In turn, the ambivalence that exists in relationships may provide some motivation to individuals in resolving their career development tasks. Perhaps because the *CDQ* cases were drawn from a counseling context wherein the clients were dissatisfied with a particular aspect of their work lives, we did not find support for the position that coworkers can be critical sources of support in vocational adjustment, a finding that has been identified in more broad-based samples (e.g., Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997). In addition, the *CDQ* cases contained several examples of clients struggling to balance work and relationship roles, with the overlap between these domains often engendering further distress and psychological pain. The following inferences capture the main elements of the motivational and conflictual aspects of the work-relationship space.

- Peers can often serve as a career "yardstick"; they have the potential of suggesting what we can achieve or what we desire to avoid (Felisha, Publican, Rachel).
- Significant others, including family members, spouses, and close friends, can function as external motivators for career development by helping individuals to face rather than avoid difficult dilemmas (Harry, Justin, Sondra, Rachel, Allan, Peter).
- Competition between siblings can both foster and inhibit career development (Justin, Peter, Randall, Rosie).
- Recipes for the integration of love and work may be difficult to establish in a changing sociocultural context, affecting both the relational and work aspects of human experience (Lynn & Robert, Rachel, Rosie).

The recapitulation of family roles in career decision making and work-based settings. One of the prominent themes in the work-relationship literature pertaining to the recapitulation of family roles in work-based settings (e.g., Chusid & Cochran, 1989) was also evident in some of the *CDQ* cases.

As the examples that we provide indicate, a number of clients at the post-implementation as well as preimplementation phases tended to reenact certain elements of their family roles and struggles in the process of decision making and adjusting to a work context. The examples that follow convey a world of work that is deeply relational across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Case of Sondra. (Sondra is a 25-year-old European American who is employed as a librarian assistant.) Sondra's parents and siblings continue to play a large role in her life as she seeks approval from them for any major decision that she makes. It appears that she does not trust herself to finalize a major decision without confirmation from her family. It should be noted that Sondra tends to assume the aspirations, if not the values, of those around her. This trait applies not only to her vocational pursuits but to her hobbies and other leisure activities.

Case of Dean. (Dean is a 31-year-old European American man who presents with an awareness that his successful attempts to obtain a sizable income have not led him to an inner sense of personal satisfaction with his work life. The following excerpt is from a reaction to the case by Cheryl Sandford Jenkins.)

> Dean's father has little money—Dean makes $100,000. His father worked Dean hard as a young boy. Dean makes a point of saying he has provided financially for his own son. From what economic and perhaps interpersonal struggle is Dean trying to protect his son? Dean hints at conflicts with his parents. Was Dean's vow to make $100,000 a vow to his father? Did family dynamics contribute to the ulcers? The driving force of this first minicycle of Dean's development may well have been the need to separate and individuate from his father and prove his own competence.

Case of Publican. (The following material is from the interviewer, Dr. Richard Bradley.) "In the work world, this pattern of being the social person who drew others together was a new role for [him]. Maybe [he] had experienced this in the family when trying to negotiate between [his] mother and father."

Consistent with the family systems literature (e.g., Chusid & Cochran, 1989; Lopez & Andrews, 1987), one theme that emerged suggests that family-based interpersonal patterns can be recapitulated in the career development and adjustment processes. The precise nature of this recapitulation is difficult to predict and seems to be contingent on the unique configuration of individual differences and environmental forces. The following inference summarizes our observations about the relationship between family roles and work roles:

- Family issues can be recapitulated in career decision making and in the workplace (Dean, Publican, Sondra).

The social and economic frame of the relationship/work space. A central theme in the career development literature in the past few decades is that the social and economic context frames and often limits options and opportunities (Carter & Cook, 1992; Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1995). As the following vignettes from the *CDQ* material suggest, close and supportive relationships interact with many of the external obstacles that often inhibit career development and access to the opportunity structure.

Case of Rhonda. (Rhonda is a 34-year-old European American faced with the need to make a career change due to the upgrading of her position after working as an employee relations assistant. This upgrading would require that she have a 4-year college degree, which she does not possess.) With just 2 months notice, Rhonda has to make a major career change after 14 years with the same firm. The desire for family stability and the presence of Rhonda's extended family have contributed to the decision to limit her job search radius.

Case of Fabian. (Fabian is a 34-year-old married man with six children; he was attending college at the time of the counseling intervention and presented with career indecision.) Fabian projected a sense of urgency in choosing the "correct career." [He] acknowledged that the final decision was his responsibility, but the choice must also include the effect it would have on his six children. Fabian felt that his family obligations were in direct conflict with his personal dreams and goals.

Case of Jessie. (Jessie is a 45-year-old woman who presented with considerable financial stresses due to an economically impoverished history and with the need to obtain regular and meaningful employment.) In 1980, [Jessie] started specializing in baking small pies and selling them to a local business. [She] noted that she prospered in this situation until her husband became involved. She indicated that John [her ex-husband] wanted her to sell the pies for more money and that this action resulted in the termination of the business relationship between Jessie and the store owner in town. She continues to have numerous conflicts with her ex-husband.

As these examples illustrate, close relationships intersect significantly with other contextual factors such as access to educational and vocational opportunities and labor market conditions (cf. Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001). In the last case described, Jessie is experiencing a negative

influence from her husband, which has the effect of further marginalizing her from the means to establish herself vocationally and earn a living. As these few *CDQ* cases suggest, relational factors interact in a highly complex fashion with social, economic, and historical circumstances. Our results identified considerable variability with respect to the confluence of relationships, social and economic factors, and career development. Some individuals seem to derive support in their relationships, whereas others may experience some of their connections as an obstacle to their own individual development, which may be further impaired by lack of access to the opportunity structure. The following inferences summarize our impressions based on the variant findings within this particular thematic domain:

- Family obligations (often manifested in relation to financial constraints) may contribute to remaining in an unsatisfying job, remaining underemployed, and/or limiting one's career dreams (Melvin, Rhonda, Fabian, Rosie).
- Social support and role models can help marginalized individuals (e.g., visible racial and ethnic minorities, gay and lesbian individuals, disabled clients) navigate the obstacles that exist in their career development (Peter, Randall, Felisha, Allan, Jessie).

DISCUSSION

The findings that we have presented regarding the intersection of work and relational functioning in the *CDQ* cases yield some rich connections that provide a foundation for further exploration and inquiry. As we have indicated, the only typical finding (using the Hill et al., 1997, taxonomy) that we observed in the case vignettes was the call for more information on the relational context of the client by the discussants. Prior to exploring this particular observation, we would like to comment on the relative dearth of common threads of relationship material in the actual case descriptions. In our view, it is very likely that the authors of the case material may have felt pressed to present primarily work-based material in their submissions due to the career focus of *CDQ*. Yet it is important to recall that the nature of training in counseling and counseling psychology in most graduate programs in the United States typically emphasizes skills in counseling broadly conceived, encompassing both career and relationship and/or family issues. As such, the relative absence of relevant findings is of potential concern for those who have emphasized the interface of work and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Hackett, 1993; Richardson, 1996). In addition, it may be that the editing process resulted in the deletion of previously included material that may have been more relevant to relationship themes. However,

the fact that most of the discussants raised questions about the importance of relational issues suggests that the need to understand the context of the client more fully is indeed a fairly representative phenomenon among one particular cohort of practitioners, at least within this unique sample of published case material.

Despite the obvious career focus of the *CDQ* cases, we have been able to discern some important and potentially rich ideas from the variant findings. Some of these observations are consistent with previous research and theory and with the findings in the Phillips et al. (2001) and Schultheiss et al. (2001) articles in this issue. For example, the notion that relationships can facilitate progress in career development is evident in some of the cases and also supports a growing body of empirical and theoretical literature (e.g., O'Brien, 1996; Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001). The way in which these relationships function to enhance the career development of the clients varied considerably, ranging from emotional support to instrumental assistance in locating resources and opportunities. A number of the cases described close friendships and family members helping clients to actively engage and face challenges as opposed to avoiding or retreating from difficult circumstances (cf. Phillips et al., 2001). Furthermore, the support of an activist stance on the part of significant others seemed to be particularly important to several of the clients in these cases. This finding merits more research, as it offers a potentially useful means of intervening in career development.

The findings, however, did not convey a unidimensional view of the role of relationships in the lives of these clients. Some of the vignettes suggested that selected close relationships were quite complex and often were characterized by considerable ambivalence. In fact, the complexity of our findings underscores the inherent difficulty of simple linear notions about relational influences in work-based functioning. For example, there were several illustrations of clients whose conflictual or competitive relationships seemed to help them feel sufficiently engaged to confront their impending career development tasks perhaps as a way of distancing themselves or further differentiating themselves from a difficult relational pattern or connection.

In exploring the nuances of the interpersonal relationship/work interface in further depth, the affective valence of a given relationship often had a relatively direct influence on the career development of some of the clients. As our results revealed, a few of the clients indicated that their siblings functioned as a point of comparison, often leading to feelings of self-doubt or enhanced motivation. This observation, coupled with the Schultheiss et al. findings (2001), suggests that it may be timely to initiate an examination of the roles that siblings play in career development.

In a related fashion, some of the cases described a process of social comparison that seems to play a key role in helping clients understand how they

are faring in their educational and career development. The potential problems with social comparison are noteworthy in that individuals can experience considerable distress in comparing themselves with others. The role of social comparison has not been addressed extensively in career development. In fact, the influence that others seemed to have in our sample parallels the concept of social facilitation from the social psychology literature (e.g., Forsyth, 1999). (Social facilitation refers to the effects that others have on individual performance.) Our findings suggest the utility of exploring the social comparison or facilitation process in greater depth, as it may exert considerable influence on the development, implementation, and adjustment to one's work life.

Although most of the cases focused on pre-implementation career behavior, a number of the *CDQ* vignettes addressed the intersection of relationships and work behavior on the job. As reflected in the family systems literature, work and educational environments often evoke responses that may parallel the family dynamics of some clients (cf. Lopez & Andrews, 1987; Ulrich & Dunne, 1986). Consistent with this literature and the few cases in this sample that addressed postimplementation behavior, further research on the reenactment of family issues in the workplace seems warranted. Questions such as how some individuals from traumatized backgrounds can overcome such a painful recapitulation while others struggle continually with pervasive problems in dealing with authority and conflict need to be addressed in further research.

The relationship/work interface of some of the clients was clearly affected by a wide array of environmental influences. For example, lack of opportunities often coexisted with family demands to reduce a client's sense of flexibility and optimism. In our view, the role of "reality factors" such as financial burdens, family commitments, and labor market conditions was powerfully evident in many of these cases, thereby rendering them far more realistic than many current career counseling books and articles. Within this framework of very real and pressing social and economic concerns, the career problems of most of the *CDQ* cases became far more complex than the "three sessions and a cloud of dust" reputation that has endured within the career counseling field for too long. Moreover, our sense is that the relational support was even more important in those cases wherein clients were faced with external obstacles (such as those with physical disabilities or those who were poor).

The results of this study also suggest some important new directions for theory development in counseling psychology. One of the key observations in this project has been the complex quality of the intersection between work and interpersonal relationships. In a general sense, these findings indicate that new theory construction efforts need to contextualize human behavior within its interpersonal and work-based milieu to a far greater extent than is

currently the case in extant psychological theory. Another important theoretical implication of this study is that the work experiences of the clients were highly evocative and often quite painful. As such, theory development in counseling would benefit from a clear acknowledgment that work is as personal for many individuals as are interpersonal relationships.

Although there were few overwhelmingly common threads in these cases, our results indicated that nearly each client and counselor or discussant mentioned relationships in some clear and cogent fashion. Naturally, there are several important limitations in our study. The case vignettes that we selected were not random but in fact were used due to their representativeness of a profession's collective voice. Like other qualitative studies, this study may have been biased by our individual and collective views on the career counseling/psychotherapy interface; however, the use of auditors and highly rigorous data analytic methods offers a critical counterpoint to these classic conundrums of qualitative analyses.

These limitations notwithstanding, we believe that we have learned a great deal from listening carefully to clients and counselors. As our findings suggest, it seems that the career clients in these *CDQ* cases tell us not only of their vocational problems and dissatisfactions, they also communicate substantially about their inner world, and they invite us to join that world for a brief period. Our team was able to join this inner world via our qualitative inquiry and in doing so, we have been informed and humbled by the complex, interwoven struggles that have been so powerfully rendered in these wonderful case vignettes.

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