

A Relational Approach to Career Counseling: Theoretical Integration and Practical Application

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This article reviews the current status of career theory in practice and presents a theoretical overview of relational theory and its logical extension to the career domain. Despite the emergence of literature regarding the interconnectedness of career progress and the quality of relationships in one's life (e.g., D. L. Blustein, 2001; D. L. Blustein, M. S. Prezioso, & D. E. P. Schultheiss, 1995; D. E. P. Schultheiss, H. M. Kress, A. J. Manzi, & J. M. Glasscock, 2001), counseling practice is limited by the absence of a meaningful approach to intervene in clients' relational and career worlds. The relational career counseling approach moves counseling toward a contextually based relational perspective to facilitating career progress. This approach is illustrated with a case example.

Embedded in our mainstream culture is the propensity to equate the need for connection and relationship with dependency—something to be avoided in favor of independent thought and judgment (Stiver, 1991). This theme has pervaded much of traditional psychological thought and developmental theory (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978). The career development literature has been no exception. Indeed, relational experiences at the heart of career progress are frequently devalued and disregarded in favor of more autonomous approaches to exploration and decision making (e.g., Harren, 1979). This perspective is antithetical to that of relational theorists who have asserted that interconnection and relatedness are central to human growth and development and that relatedness serves as a context for the experience of the self (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Josselson, 1992). Moreover, the capacity to create and maintain growth-fostering relationships is crucial for healthy developmental progress (Gilligan, 1982, 2000; Miller & Stiver, 1997). These views have been echoed in a recent movement in psychology and the social sciences toward a relationally based perspective that acknowledges the adaptive function of interpersonal connection (e.g., Bowlby, 1982; Cutrona, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Josselson, 1992; Teyber, 2000). Consistent with this trend is a recent emergence of literature regarding the interconnectedness of career progress and the quality of relationships in one's life (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Blustein et al., 2001; Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995; Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001; Schultheiss, 2000; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, &

Glasscock, 2001). What transpires in our relationships may be key to the facilitation or hindrance of our ability to progress effectively through challenging career tasks and our ability to benefit from more traditional career counseling practices. Despite this burgeoning interest in the interface between work and relationships, career counseling practice is limited by the relative absence of a meaningful approach to intervene in the work/relationship space in the career counseling milieu. Innovative models of career counseling are needed to assist us in revealing the web of relational connections in which clients' career and work lives are embedded. One's deepest connections with others can no longer be ignored or extracted from the career development and counseling process. Practitioners must strive to better understand the interconnections between career progress and the relational experiences of clients. Interventions must be transformed into more sensitively based interactions that nurture mutuality and growth in human connection. Thus, the purpose of this work is to build on recent empirical advances regarding work and relationships (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Blustein et al., 2001; Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001) by reviewing the current status of career theory in practice and by presenting a theoretical overview of relational theory and its logical extension to the career domain. A relational approach to career counseling is explored and illustrated with a case example.

CAREER THEORY AND RESEARCH

Career theory (e.g., Gati, 1986; Gati, Fassa, & Houminer, 1995; Holland, 1997; Krumboltz & Hamel, 1977) has tradi-

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tionally been based on the merit of independent thought and judgment. Indeed, beginning with Frank Parsons's (1909) prescription of a "true and reasoned match," career theorists and practitioners have aimed to formulate autonomous approaches to healthy progress and success in the career realm. Implicit in the trait and factor theories that pervade much of career counseling practice is the underlying value of rational thought and logical decision making—resulting in a successful match between an individual's characteristics (i.e., aptitudes, achievements, interests, values, and personality) and the characteristics of occupational environments. Carefully constructed tests and measurements, such as the Strong Interest Inventory (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994), have been developed to assess and classify individuals and occupations to aid in this process. Hence, career counseling has been conceptualized as a process wherein individuals are guided through the collection and integration of varied information about themselves and the world of work, followed by a rational process of decision making. Although useful classification systems have emerged from this work, such as Holland's (1997) typology of personality and work environments, trait and factor approaches have been limited in the degree to which they incorporate the context (i.e., cultural, social, economic, and relational) within which careers are created. Whereas contextual factors were long considered moderating influences in the career development and counseling process, contemporary theory, research, and practice have brought these issues to the fore (e.g., Fouad & Bingham, 1995; Leong & Brown, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990).

The central role of relational experience is the most recent contextual factor to gain serious attention in the theoretical and empirical literature within the career domain (e.g., Blustein, 2001; Blustein et al., 2001; Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001). Previously, relational influences invoked a negative connotation and were conceptualized as a hindrance to effective and successful career decision making. As such, those who used others in their career decision making were referred to in the literature as "dependent" (Harren, 1979) or "compliant" (Dinklage, 1968). Thus, often an unproductive passive or coerced position with respect to others was assumed or implied. Rational prescriptive approaches to career decision making leave little-to-no room for the effective use of relational resources in their individualistic models. For example, Krumboltz and Hamel's (1977) systematic approach to career decision making offers a highly organized, detailed, and behavioral prescription for successful decision making. Gati (1986) and Gati et al. (1995) described a sequential elimination approach to career decision making that is also characterized by a series of rational and logical steps. Until recently, these methodical autonomous approaches were met with few challenges (e.g., Gelatt, 1989).

A fresh perspective that views the use of others as a central resource in the decisional process is beginning to emerge (Phillips, 1997). Phillips offered an alternative perspective on decision making that emphasizes implications for deciding within a life-span, life-space context consistent with

Super's (1980) model. This perspective appreciates the complexity confronted by a decision-maker when the context of multiple life roles is considered. From this vantage point, consulting others may be viewed as a valuable form of help, particularly when decisional fields increase in complexity and span multiple life roles.

These innovative ideas have led the way to new lines of inquiry using discovery-oriented methods that more sensitively depict the lives and choices faced by those with complex career decisions. To illustrate the role of relationships in career decision making, Phillips et al. (2001) analyzed interview data from young adults who had recently made significant career decisions in the transition from school to work. Their findings uncovered relational themes that provide an enlightened view of how relationships with others are used in the decision-making process. These themes reflect the different ways that others involve themselves (actions of others), are invoked by the decider (recruitment of others), or are excluded from an individual's deliberations (pushing others away). Subsequent research (Christopher, Phillips, Lisi, Groat, & Carlson, 1999; Phillips et al., 2000) has resulted in a reformulation of these themes to reflect two continua: actions of others (i.e., the ways in which others involve themselves in the field of the decider) and self-directedness (i.e., the ways in which the decider relies on self and others in the decision-making process). This research offers a broadened and less negatively biased view of the role of others in the decision-making process and expands on traditional taxonomies of decision-making strategies (Phillips et al., 2001).

To enrich our understanding of relational influences on college student career development, Schultheiss et al. (2001) developed a relationships and career interview to assess how relationships are influential in the career exploration and decision-making process. Using interview data, Schultheiss et al. (2001) identified prominent factors in relational influence across relationship domains (i.e., parents, siblings, extended family members, and significant others). The most consistent factor that was identified was the relationship as a multidimensional source of support (i.e., emotional, social, esteem, information, and tangible assistance). Other important relational factors included role model influences, personality characteristics and ideology, childhood experiences, disruptions in relationships, geographical location of parents, parental nature of the relationship with one's most important sibling, and emotional distance with other siblings. In a related investigation, Schultheiss, Palma, Predragovich, and Glasscock (2002) examined the reciprocal relational influence of siblings' career paths, the influence of the participant's career path on their relationships, and times in the participant's career development when relationships were most important. Their findings affirmed the importance of reciprocal and mutual multidimensional support, role modeling, and learning from others' experiences. The results also revealed significant ways that one's career path influences important relationships. For example, some participants indicated that their career path had positively in-

fluenced their relationships because others became increasingly involved and interested in them and their career. Others depicted a more negative or conflictual influence in that their careers had put pressure and stress on their relationships. Additional findings indicated that relationships were most important during educational and career transitions, when making decisions, and when assessing or affirming commitments. Together, this line of inquiry highlights the reciprocal and embedded nature of relational and career domains and affirms the dynamic and fluid nature of relational influence on career progress.

Using a novel approach to describing the interface between work and relationships, Blustein et al. (2001) identified themes relevant to work and interpersonal relationships in case vignettes and discussants' reactions from the "Getting Down to Cases" section in *The Career Development Quarterly*. Common themes to emerge included the following: the function of relational support in career development, the motivational and conflictual nature of work/relationships, family roles in decision making, and the role of social and economic forces in the interface between work and relationships. These results offer a multidimensional view of relational influence and further support the idea that relationships are important in the facilitation of career progress.

Literature on the career development of racial and ethnic minorities supports the importance of collectivist values on career choice behaviors (Leong, 1995). For example, greater emphasis on the importance of family and community rather than on the individual is (in general) more typical of Asian, Hispanic, and Native American groups than of European Americans (Arbona, 1995; Johnson, Swartz, & Martin, 1995; Leong & Serafica, 1995). In addition, research also points to the importance of family in African American career development, although better controlled studies are needed to substantiate this claim (M. T. Brown, 1995). Therefore, although multicultural theory points to the importance of relationship in career progress, little attention has been given to career theory, research, or practice efforts that reflect these worldviews. This incongruity between multicultural collectivist values and empirically based counseling interventions reflective of such values supports the need for a relational career counseling approach that addresses issues relevant to the growing number of culturally diverse individuals who value interdependence. An integrated understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage, acculturation, generational status, and ethnic identity development is needed to more sensitively approach career counseling from a more meaningful cultural and relational context.

The empirical literature that is emerging regarding the interface of relationships and career progress has generated a multifaceted and complex view of relational influence on career development and behavior. As support mounts for a contextually based relational perspective to understanding career progress, theory and research will continue to advance and reshape the discourse on career behavior. This work begins to move the career field toward a more holistic view of client functioning and to generate support and in-

terest in integrative models of service delivery that incorporate the relational context into career counseling. As such, it is important to explore the conceptual underpinnings of relational theory that underlie this work. Therefore, an overview of relational theories that guide this line of inquiry is provided.

RELATIONAL THEORY

Originating in feminist theory, relationally based practices have recently been advocated as a more inclusive approach for both genders (Gilligan, 2000). Feminist scholars have long asserted that a woman's sense of self is a relational one (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976; Stiver, 1991, Surrey, 1991) and that a woman's need to feel related to others is a crucial aspect of her identity (Stiver, 1991). Surrey has put forth a theory of women's development that focuses specifically on the self-in-relation. The basic notion of self-in-relation emphasizes a paradigm shift from separation to relationship as the basis for self-experience and development. Thus, the deepening capacity for relationship and relational competence is seen as the basic goal of development. Implicit in this model is that there is no inherent need to disconnect or sacrifice relationship for self-development. Instead, mutuality (or ongoing interdependence) in relationships is thought to provide purpose and meaning in one's life and enhance self-esteem (Jordan, 1991b). In fact, the development and experience of mutual empathy is a notable and important factor in relational health (Surrey, 1991). In other words, active participation in mutually empathic relationships is the goal of healthy psychological development (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Thus, counseling provides an opportunity to integrate a novel self-other experience in which the validity of both one's own experiences—and others' experiences—are acknowledged. Therefore, both responsiveness to others and the awareness of one's own needs are enhanced. This relational model suggests that the therapeutic relationship is central to the process of counseling, instead of simply providing the context for it (Jordan, 1991a). In fact, valuing interdependence may lead the counselor to encourage turning to others for support and assistance, rather than depending solely on self-reliance and independence (Jordan, 1991a).

A similar theme is apparent in the work of Josselson (1992), who described interpersonal life as an ongoing effort to connect to others. Her exploration of human relationships focused on the ways in which we need others and others need us. Thus, relatedness serves as a context for the experience of the self—central to its growth and development. Capacities for relatedness emerge over time, and relatedness becomes richer, broader, more complex, and more differentiated. Using the metaphor of space, Josselson conceptualized interpersonal life as an effort to connect and overcome the psychological and physical space between us. She described eight primary ways in which we transcend or reach through space to connect with others. As development proceeds, each way of connecting becomes more symbolic—less physical and spatial. Development progresses

from holding (representing a secure basic trust, feeling grounded), to attachment (security of predictable responsiveness and availability), passionate experience (intense affective experience), eye-to-eye validation (recognition that we have meaning to others), idealization and identification (a drawing toward others in an effort to be like them), mutuality and resonance (emotionally joining or resonating with another), embeddedness (the social context in which we define ourselves), and tending and caring (the need to take care of others and to feel needed by others). Thus, from Josselson's perspective, it is essential to attend to the multidimensionality of human relationships and also to how relational needs progress developmentally. Extrapolating from Josselson's work, Flum (2001) discussed the relevance of each relational dimension in the interface between work and interpersonal functioning. Using Josselson's dimensions, Flum described how relational qualities are allied with work experiences and career development.

Social support theorists (Caplan, 1974; Cutrona, 1996; Weiss, 1974) have long viewed intimate relationships as an important source of interpersonal support (defined as the fulfillment by others of ongoing social needs; Bowlby, 1982; Weiss, 1974). This multidimensional construct is based on a range of interpersonal behaviors known as "social provisions" (or social functions) that are thought to be provided by relationships with others and to be essential for well-being. Cutrona (1996) and Cutrona and Russell (1990) identified a core set of social functions. These included emotional support (love, empathy, concern, ability to turn to others for comfort and security), social integration or network support (feeling part of a group with people who hold similar interests and concerns), esteem support (boosting another's self-confidence through respect for other's qualities; belief in other's abilities; validation of thoughts, feelings, or actions), information support (factual input, advice or guidance, appraisal of the situation), and tangible assistance (instrumental assistance with tasks or resources). According to Cutrona (1996), theory and research suggest that a history of supportive interactions may prepare one to deal effectively with stressful situations. More specifically, Cutrona (1996) provided evidence to suggest that supportive interactions lead to the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs, the minimization of interpersonal anxiety, faith in the availability of assistance when it is needed, confirmation and validation of one's adequacy in valued life roles, and social control.

Attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1982) has also provided a useful theoretical framework for conceptualizing the importance of relationships in development and adjustment (e.g., Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). According to Bowlby (1982), individuals at any age are better adjusted when they have confidence in the accessibility and responsiveness of a trusted other. A central tenet of this theory concerns the central role of *attachments*, defined by Bowlby as enduring emotional bonds of substantial intensity that influence healthy development and participation in satisfying relationships. Regularities in interactions with caregivers provide children with a sense

of security. As individuals mature, cognitive representations (schemas)—or internal working models of attachment relationships—develop and become essential to the experience of security throughout the life span and are predictive of a number of adaptive outcomes (Parkes, Stevenson-Hinde, & Marris, 1991). These models become activated and essential during times of stress. From the perspective of attachment theory, one's continued participation in mutually satisfying relationships plays a significant role in healthy human development across the life span (Lopez, 1995). Thus, consistent with other relational theories (i.e., Cutrona, 1996; Jordan, 1991a; Josselson, 1992; Surrey, 1991), attachment theory also views human development as occurring through active participation of the individual within significant relational contexts (Lopez, 1995).

A common thread is woven throughout the relational theories discussed here. The importance of relational connection that has been so neglected, and at times denigrated by traditional psychological thought (N. O. Brown, 1959; Freud, 1923; Marcuse, 1966) and career development theory (e.g., Dinklage, 1968; Harren, 1979), is not simply recognized but embraced as a core factor in healthy developmental progress. These relational theories capture a paradigm shift from the relationship as a peripheral element to the relationship as an integral component of developmental progress, emotional health, and interpersonal life. Mutuality and interdependence are conceived of as being at the heart of healthy development and functioning. The way that people join together to touch each other's lives comes to the fore as relational counselors reach across the space between (cf. Josselson, 1992) counselor and client and encourage clients to do the same in their everyday life. Relational theory provides the conceptual framework that facilitates a more complete contextual understanding of the interdependence of our lives with those closest to us. The space between self and other (cf. Josselson, 1992) needs to be redefined in order to incorporate value and respect for connection and give credence to the relationship. It is from this perspective that an integrated view of relational and career theory is presented.

INTEGRATION OF RELATIONAL THEORY WITH CAREER THEORY

Josselson (1992) suggested that people create their lives within a web of connection to others. Why not their careers? Or more precisely, why has career theory neglected the importance of connectedness with others? The goal of integrating relational theory with career theory is to provide a more holistic integrative conceptual framework, or meta-perspective, that recognizes the value of relational connection and, quite simply, the realities of people's lives. This meta-perspective allows for the integration of established career practices with a more sensitive appreciation of the intertwined nature of people's relational and career worlds. This contextual perspective offers a unique contribution to career counseling theory and practice by bringing the benefits of the relational context (as discussed by Bowlby, 1982; Cutrona, 1996; Josselson, 1992) to bear on career

issues. In other words, consideration of one's relational network offers a broadened perspective that can facilitate intervention across domains in a way that benefits both one's relationships and career progress. Thus, one might consider the possibilities of using relationships to enhance career development and using one's career issues and challenges as an opportunity to enhance connections with others. Reminiscent of relational therapy (Jordan, 1991a), a relational approach to career counseling facilitates progress in the career domain by helping clients to create, nurture, and grow from a sense of connection with others. Moreover, this approach can offer an opportunity to enrich relational experiences and can encourage a sense of connection between one's inner experience and others' subjective experiences of us (cf. Jordan, 1991a). Thus, relational career counseling provides an integrative framework for incorporating the career and noncareer domains of functioning into therapeutic work that has been so frequently called for as a more comprehensive framework for counseling (e.g., Betz & Corning, 1993; Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Rak & O'Dell, 1994; Schultheiss, 2000; Subich, 1993; Swanson, 1995). This meta-perspective enriches traditional career counseling practice by acknowledging the potential adaptive function of interpersonal connection in approaching career development tasks, while validating clients' real life decision-making experiences. Consequently, relational career counseling offers the opportunity to increase awareness of one's relational needs and connect important areas of one's life, love, and work (Jordan, 1991a).

One objective of this underutilized approach is to recognize the way that others can be a viable option and resource for facilitating healthy developmental progress in the career domain. Simply acknowledging the role of other people in clients' lives can be affirming and beneficial, as clients realize that they do not have to struggle with challenging career tasks in isolation. Thus, counselors can help clients to gain insight into the interconnected domains of life, and thereby assist them in negotiating these intertwined pathways. This task seems particularly important given recent evidence supporting the reciprocal impact of careers and relationships (Schultheiss et al., 2002). Therefore, the relational context is one that is deserving of more attention. Insight gained through counseling can help clients guide their behavior in a manner that acknowledges their interdependence with others, yet it is consistent with their underlying needs and goals.

The counselor's own appreciation of the importance of relational interdependence provides recognition and an acknowledgment of the importance of turning to others for support and assistance, rather than relying solely on a utopian view of self-reliance and independence (Jordan, 1991a). Moreover, the counseling relationship provides an important source of support and empathic empowerment. In other words, through the counseling relationship clients come to feel more confident and efficacious so that they can act to improve their situation by seeking out relational support and being open to receiving it. Clients can thereby consider the input of others, as well as benefit from other varied

relational resources (e.g., being a role model, tangible assistance), without losing sight of their own needs.

In summary, consistent with literature supporting the importance of close relationships (e.g., Jordan, 1991a; Surrey, 1991), a relational approach to career counseling is put forth as a meta-perspective to guide career counseling practice from a more holistic perspective. This practice incorporates relational factors into the assessment, conceptualization, and intervention phases of career counseling. It calls for a refocusing of counselors' attention on the personal and relational lives of clients to augment and enrich more traditional career counseling practices. Previously overlooked components of career and noncareer areas of functioning are illuminated, and artificial boundaries that have existed between career counseling and counseling in the noncareer domain can be bridged. This model, presented as follows, is based on the work of Schultheiss (2000), Schultheiss et al. (2001), and Schultheiss et al. (2002).

RELATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The practical application of this conceptual model begins with an assessment phase. The primary goal of assessing clients' relational context is to provide an in-depth examination of the role of relationships in their life and career. Clients are assisted in identifying and clarifying how they use others—or how others involve themselves (cf. Phillips et al., 2001)—in their approach to career tasks such as exploration and decision making. The counselor qualitatively assesses clients' perceptions of their relationships and the influence of these relationships on their career development. In addition to exploring how clients' relational and work worlds intersect, it is also helpful for clients to describe important relationships with others. Through this process, both counselor and client gain a better understanding of how the client connects with others and how these connections are interdependent with the individual's work world. The relationships and career interview (Schultheiss et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al. 2002), described next, is used to facilitate this assessment.

Assessment begins by having clients identify the relationships that have been most influential (positively or negatively) in their career development. Clients are then asked to describe how these and other important relationships (e.g., with parents, siblings, and significant others) have been influential in their career exploration and decision-making processes. The assessment proceeds with questions that encourage clients to discuss the specific influential aspects or qualities of their relationships. They are encouraged to explore the positive/facilitative relational influences, as well as any neutral, negative, or conflictual factors. Through this process of guided exploration, positive relational resources are revealed—together with any vulnerable shortcomings in the availability and accessibility of secure figures in the individual's life.

Clients are also asked to discuss how they have made career decisions in the past to gain a better understanding of

their decision-making style and the role of relationships in their decisional field. Counselors must listen carefully for relational themes that emerge and then validate these experiences. This is important because clients may be hesitant to explore these issues given that much of our culture denounces the reliance on others (Lasch, 1978). More explicit information might be obtained by asking clients to describe a difficult career decision that they have made and by prompting them to discuss what role, if any, relationships played in this decision. Calling to mind a difficult career decision allows clients to focus on a particularly challenging experience and to be more specific in evaluating relational influences. It may be useful to have clients assess the quality of their decisions—and the usefulness of their decisional strategies—including any reliance on others for support, advice, or information. It may also be useful to assess clients' confidence or comfort level in using others in making decisions, as well as the degree of self-directedness in their decision making (the ways the decider relies on self and others in the decision-making process; Phillips et al., 2000). This may be an important factor because, as Phillips et al. (2000) have found, greater self-direction does not necessarily mean that one is deciding in isolation. The process of revealing meaningful relational influences and assessing self-directedness assists counselors in evaluating the relational context within which their clients are striving toward self-knowledge and choice.

The product of relational assessment is a more complete view of the client's relational world. Both counselor and client gain a clearer picture of the client's relational resources, as well as the degree to which he or she has drawn on these resources in the past. In particular, a better understanding is gained of how others have been involved in the client's decision making and the effects of this involvement. The information gained in the assessment phase becomes useful as the counselor assists the client in identifying and accessing his or her available relational resources.

RELATIONAL INTERVENTION

The primary goals of relational intervention are to assist clients in becoming better equipped to face relational and career dilemmas, progress effectively within the career domain, effectively draw on relationships with others as resources in the career development process, and benefit from deepened and more meaningful connections with others. More specifically, interventions directed toward assisting clients in becoming more attuned to their relational strivings—and the role these strivings play across developmental domains—would effectively broaden the sphere of resources available to clients as they traverse the interconnected pathways of life and work. For example, clients might be assisted in accessing and benefiting from their closest relationships with others as they approach novel and potentially anxiety-producing challenges within the career domain (e.g., deciding on a major). Through counseling, clients learn to reach out and connect with others, thereby engaging in mu-

tually enhancing relationships that provide interdependent sources of support, assistance, and self-worth.

Relational interventions might begin by helping clients to become more attuned to those closest to them and the role they have played—or could play—in their life and work. Further exploration of family relationship factors relevant to career concerns might be pursued so that clients gain insight into existing patterns of interaction and their impact on career progress. Enhanced engagement with positive relational resources could then be encouraged as counselors work with clients to nurture healthy and productive interactions with others. Thus, counselors intervene to help clients draw on positive relationships that might provide support or otherwise facilitate career progress. For example, others might be effective role models, offer information or tangible assistance, or influence important personal beliefs (e.g., the value of education).

Counselors could also assist clients in becoming less reliant on unproductive, unrewarding, and ineffective interactions with others and in becoming more proficient in recruiting and using relational resources in more productive and effective ways. Where weaknesses emerge within the individual's relational network, the counselor might assist the client in improving his or her relationships, resolving conflicts, or developing alternative sources of relational support. In situations in which few or strained relationships exist, the counselor might guide the client in developing new, healthier alliances and bases of support and help him or her to understand and appreciate the positive function of connection with others. Family members, teachers, advisors, or supervisors might all be considered potential relational resources. In summary, interventions that facilitate the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial interactions with others would likely lead to healthier developmental progress in the client's relational and work worlds.

The counseling relationship, itself, could also provide an important source of support and empathic empowerment. More specifically, in perceiving the counselor as a secure, reliable and empathic figure, the client might gain the strength and confidence needed to take risks and effectively meet challenges in interpersonal and career domains. To illustrate the application of this conceptual relational model, the following career counseling case is described and discussed.

CASE STUDY

Michelle is a 20-year-old, single, second generation Asian American woman who attends a large public urban university. She is a second-semester sophomore with an undecided major. During the first semester of her freshman year, she went to career counseling at the university counseling center at the insistence of her father. She reports that her counseling experience was a positive one, but not very helpful in assisting her to choose a major. She has considered a major in music, math, and business. Michelle is now returning for career counseling because her academic advisor has suggested that she needs to be more "directed" and declare a major.

Michelle obtained good grades in high school and in college, and her favorite subject is math. She enjoys the academic setting and feels very comfortable there. Michelle enjoys playing the violin, and her music professors have told her that she has real talent. She has not been very active in extracurricular activities other than her high school orchestra. Michelle has held part-time summer jobs, such as working as a cashier at a local grocery store.

Michelle chose to attend her current university on the urging of her father, who was pleased that it was close to home and offered music as a major. She indicates that her father is very supportive of her and has great confidence in her abilities as a musician. He has encouraged her to talk to her music teachers about possible careers in the field. Michelle's father has a bachelor's degree and works as an accountant. His passion is music, and he regrets not being able to pursue a career in the arts. Her mother did not attend college and has worked at home raising her family. According to Michelle, her mother does not care what she majors in, as long as she is happy. She describes her relationship with her mother as very loving and caring. Although she states that her mother is supportive, she describes her mother as not being very involved in the career aspects of her life.

She has one older sister, one older brother, and one sister who is 6 years younger than she is. Michelle talks with her older sister about career issues. She states that this sister gives her ideas or suggestions about careers that she might not have thought of and that this helps her feel that she could be capable in areas that she had not previously considered. Michelle indicates that her older sister and her sister's husband, with whom she lived last year, set an example for her. She sees them as professionals who do work that is important and meaningful to them. The example they set makes her want to commit to something meaningful.

CASE DISCUSSION

Relational Assessment

The relational assessment for Michelle reveals a more complete contextual view of the environment in which she strives toward self-definition and choice. Discussions with Michelle clearly indicate that she is emotionally close to her father and that she honors him by valuing his opinion and following his suggestions. She describes him as a very enthusiastic father who has a very special interest in her pursuing a career in music. On careful exploration of Michelle's career decisions, one finds that she has typically complied with others' suggestions, such as those of her father (e.g., her decision to attend the college of her father's choice) and her advisor. Little else is revealed in terms of her use of others in approaching career decision tasks. As such, it seems that Michelle relies almost entirely on using others for their advice and knowledge (e.g., father, music teachers, advisor). Consequently, one might argue that Michelle is at risk of using others in a limited manner (cf. Phillips et al., 2001) and allowing others to assume responsibility for her decisions. Conceivably, this could be contributing to her decision-making difficulties.

Analysis of Michelle's relational context is not complete without consideration of her cultural background and the role this might play in her relational and career context. Asian Americans are known to be greatly influenced by a culture that places a high value on collectivism, interdependence, and respect for authority and elders (Moy, 1992). Research suggests that Asian Americans demonstrate higher levels of dependent decision-making styles and lower career maturity and vocational identity when compared with their European American peers (Leong, 1991). Theory also suggests that Asian American parents are likely to provide strong parental guidance regarding career and to exert direct influence on the aspirations and choices of their children (Leong, 1995). For example, some Asian American parents prefer that their children pursue a career that is both practical and marketable (e.g., medicine or engineering), possibly as a way to counter the effects of discrimination in the workplace (Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Asian American children are apt to defer to such parental guidance given cultural values that call for respecting authority and the wisdom of elders. Therefore, in choosing a career, Asian American youth are confronted with the task of choosing a career that is both of interest to them and acceptable to their parents (Leong, 1991, 1995). Regarding Michelle, one might engage her in a sensitive exploration of her cultural values as they relate to her cultural relational context. One might also help her to explore her feelings regarding her father's wishes for her occupational future. She could then be assisted in integrating her values with her approach to the career tasks confronting her.

Acculturation and generational status also play important roles in conceptualizing Michelle's behavior and her father's efforts to encourage her to engage in career counseling and in a less than culturally traditional career. Research considering the role that acculturation and generational status play in Asian Americans' career choice and help-seeking behavior suggests that those who are more acculturated, and second or third generation, are more likely to select a less traditional career and to seek out counseling services (Atkinson, Whiteley, & Gim, 1990). Moreover, regardless of acculturation or generational status, Asian Americans as a group tend to express a high need for career counseling and exhibit a greater likelihood of using college career centers than do their European American counterparts (D. Brown, Minor, & Jepsen, 1991). Therefore, although Asian Americans tend to underutilize mental health counseling services (Leong, 1995), they tend to use career counseling services in greater numbers. This may partly account for Michelle's father's encouraging her to seek out career counseling services and pursue a less traditionally acceptable career. One might hypothesize that as a first generation Asian American, Michelle's father felt pressure to conform to his parents' aspirations for him to pursue a career that was considered more practical (i.e., accounting over music). Thus, his efforts to encourage his daughter to pursue music may be representative of his own lost dreams and dissonance regarding parental authority and the pursuit of individual interests. Michelle may be caught between the traditions of her cul-

tural heritage and the values of a predominantly individualistic majority culture.

Michelle's mother may be an untapped resource in the career domain. Currently, she seems to be a source of non-active support (cf. Phillips et al., 2001). However, given Michelle's strong and supportive relationship with her mother, Michelle may be able to enlist her mother as an important relational resource in the career domain. The findings from Schultheiss et al. (2001) indicate that there may be a number of ways that Michelle's mother might play a more influential role in this process. For example, her mother may be in a good position to fulfill other social functions beyond emotional support, including social integration (feeling a part of a group with people who hold similar interests and concerns), esteem support (boosting another's self-confidence through respect for other's qualities; belief in other's abilities; validation of thoughts, feelings, or actions), and tangible assistance (instrumental assistance with tasks; Cutrona, 1996). Counseling could facilitate this process with Michelle. For example, Michelle might be empowered to elicit these types of support from her mother, or joint sessions with Michelle and her mother might provide the venue for therapeutic change related to these issues.

Michelle's siblings may be an overlooked resource. For example, her older sister seems to be a potential role model and supportive relational influence. Through counseling, Michelle might be able to explore this relationship more fully and nurture this connection with her sister. Michelle reports that her relationships with her brother and other sister are less influential. However, we find that her younger sister has great admiration for her. Therefore, Michelle might already be having an impact on her younger sister's development. One might assist Michelle in seeing the value of reciprocal relational connections in her sibling relationships. Discovering that others respond to us and that we have an effect on others can be very affirming and deepen our value of ourselves. This would be consistent with Josselson's (1992) notion of eye-to-eye validation. To have an impact on another has great significance in the formation of one's self in relation to the world (Josselson, 1992).

Relational Intervention

Counseling might begin by facilitating Michelle's exploration of her relationship with her parents. Her father clearly has had a very important role in her educational and career choices. Thus, one might begin by having Michelle talk about her relationship with her father and the implications of her decision-making style within this relationship and the larger sociocultural context. In other words, the counselor must help Michelle become more aware of how this relationship has been influential in her decision making, how it fits into the cultural context of her family and community, and how it is consistent with her cultural identity and values. Regardless of the career decisions Michelle eventually makes, her decision-making process—and the relational tides between Michelle and her father—will likely continue to ebb and flow.

Thus, interventions will be needed to help her negotiate her relationship with her father (and his generous offers of guidance and advice) with her own internalized needs and goals.

Regarding Michelle's relationship with her mother, Michelle might be encouraged to become more active in engaging her mother as an important relational resource within the career domain. For example, the counselor could assist Michelle in exploring the possibility of enlisting her mother's active support in her career pursuits, or in eliciting her mother's confidence in her abilities. In addition, Michelle's relationship with her sister might prove to be fertile ground for relational support and guidance. Specifically, the counselor could prompt Michelle to elicit information support from her (i.e., factual input, advice, or guidance; Cutrona, 1996).

Finally, for Michelle's counselor, it would be important to attend to the therapeutic relationship. It is possible that she will come to rely on the counselor in a less than active way, reenacting underlying themes in the father-daughter relationship (and possibly the relationship with her adviser) that reflect a perceived power and authority in the counselor and Michelle's concomitant compliance. Thus, it would be essential to approach the counseling relationship by focusing on mutual empathy and authenticity in the counseling relationship. As suggested by relational theory (Jordan, 1991a), it will be essential that the counselor is one whose own appreciation of the importance of relational interdependence will lay the foundation for the experience of genuine mutual empathic responsiveness in the counseling relationship. This will facilitate the exploration of relational factors within the counseling relationship and Michelle's relationships with her family.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The relational career counseling approach presented here begins to move counseling forward toward a more contextually based meta-perspective of understanding and facilitating career progress. Scholarly efforts aimed at the development of practical frameworks to guide treatment can strengthen our conceptual understanding and improve counseling interventions designed to enhance the holistic functioning of clients. Theory supports the notion of healthy development of the self through relationships with others (e.g., Surrey, 1991). Empirical evidence suggests that relationships with others are a critical resource that can inform the decision-making process for even the most self-directed deciders (Phillips et al., 2000). The time has come to develop and assess new models of intervention that incorporate these new theoretical models and empirical findings.

The preceding assessment and intervention practices are not intended to replace current career counseling methods. Instead, a guide is provided to enrich current career counseling practices by widening the lens and refocusing our attention on the relational lives of clients. This process of refocusing does not leave behind traditional career assessment and counseling practices. In contrast, this approach can be integrated with common career practices to create a

more complete contextualized intervention strategy that facilitates developmental progress across domains. For example, relational assessment could be used in conjunction with more traditional assessment tools (e.g., measures of interests, skills, values) that provide an intrapersonal evaluation of the client. The result is a more holistic contextualized view of the client embedded within a larger relational network. Moreover, relational interventions might be particularly useful when an impasse has been reached using more traditional approaches to career counseling.

Despite the benefits of using a relational approach, relational interventions may not always be possible or desirable. Consider someone who is quiet and shy, who characteristically tends not to interact freely and comfortably with others, or someone with less than adaptive kinds of relational contexts. These individuals might best be helped by more traditional means. Despite these limitations, a relational approach to career counseling, which views the clients' relational context as an important factor in their ability to effectively engage in career development tasks, offers a heartening view of relational influence. The relational context is viewed as a resource, much as access to information and work experiences are viewed as resources. Hence, relational resources—if positive, accessible, reliable, and responsive—can facilitate career progress. In summary, a relational approach to career counseling offers a novel conceptual framework and meta-perspective to stimulate the development of new models of assessment and intervention that are relevant to clients' lives and their choices.

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