

WORK: A LIFE TASK

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"The Adlerian point of view about work is that it is a task which challenges each person to assume the responsibility for his own sustenance and make a contribution to his fellow-humans. His desire to do so is part of his social interest, .. If one uses work in this way, it leads to an enhanced feeling of self-esteem. If one sees it only as a necessary evil, then work becomes an onerous chore, to be avoided as much as possible." (Shulman, 1970 p. 68)

The community prefers that each individual contribute to his/her own welfare and to that of others. The desire to strive in this direction and to share in community feeling is based upon social interest. Social interest is a complex construct but it is essentially comprised of an active identification with the human race and a sense of belonging to it. The community structures three major area in which an individual can and should express social interest by cooperating and contributing. The three salient transactional areas are work, friendship, and love. The common-sense of the community is that occupational, social, and intimacy tasks are the main challenges of life. They offer roles through which a life should be lived. The inter-subjective consensual logic of the community expects and even demands that these challenges be faced and solved. The ability to apprehend the centrality and importance of these three tasks and to act in concert with others in responding to life's challenges rests upon cooperativeness.

Because common-sense is an aspect of cooperation, it is fundamental to conjunctive engagement of life tasks. People who remain preoccupied with their private-sense do not share in the consensual validity of responsible occupation with work, friendship, and intimacy. Rather than demonstrating the desire to be conjoint with the community by investing the tasks with personal meaning, self-centered individuals retreat from the tasks. Such an egocentric, private-sense retreat, however, leaves the person feeling estranged and socially worthless because his/her purpose in life does not extend beyond self-enhancement. Individuals whose life-style is not imbued with social interest are poorly prepared to cooperate with the community by responding realistically to the challenge of work.

Individuals with a sense of social interest view work as an opportunity to participate in the common-sense solution to the meaning of life. By cooperating with and contributing to the community through work, people embed themselves in webs of significance which extend them beyond egocentric limits. Self-extending individuals conceive of work as an opportunity to assert themselves, express their life-styles, affirm their worth, and avow their beliefs through productive action.

Work seems to be the most fundamental life task. Accepting one's place as a member of the next generation by choosing to work is the first step in being generative (e.g. productive, caring, creative). Sensing the ability to belong and having a

desire to cooperate, the individual can respond to his/her generational crisis through working. A second reason for asserting work as the basal life task is that people who wish to cooperate with the community but have not yet developed the courage to be friendly or intimate may express their collaboration with the community by working. They may accomplish this with minimal social interaction by engaging in work requiring little interpersonal association (e.g. farming, truck driving, carpentry). This resolution, however, is becoming increasingly more difficult to implement as our society shifts from primary production to service, maintenance, and managerial occupations requiring social skills. A third rationale for proposing the primacy of work is that "in our society there is no single situation which is potentially so capable of giving some satisfaction at all (Maslovian) levels of basic needs as is the occupation." (Roe, 1956, p. 31) Work, friendship, and intimacy offer potential gratification at the love and belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization levels of Maslow's need hierarchy. Only work routinely offers physiological and safety level gratifications. A fourth reason for claiming that work is the fundamental life task is that work is so thoroughly interwoven with health. The single best predictor of longevity yet discovered is work satisfaction (Palmore, 1969). Physical and emotional illness has been clearly demonstrated to result from such work problems as dissatisfaction, stress, termination, lay-off, lack of advancement, and retirement. For example, the New York Times reported the following:

"My husband came home and the afternoon shift went to work and there was a big notice on the door - This plant closed, pick up your checks at the union hall, '-said D.F., whose 59-year-old husband, R., worked at the Seaman Manufacturing Plant in Pontiac, Mich., for 23 years until last December.

After that, his wife said, he attempted to kill himself three times, and finally died three weeks later after he stopped eating.

'All he done was to live for his work,' she said, 'and when they took it away he felt like a nobody.'"

Motivation to Work

The domain of Adlerian career counseling is work motivation management and, occasionally, modification. Exploration of counselees work motivation and self-management of vocational behavior is the sine qua non of career counseling. Career choice and adjustment problems presented by clients are socio-teleo-analytically related to life-style convictions and sequent motives. These self-determined notions sustain direction and movement as the individual establishes a place as worker in school, at home, or on the job.

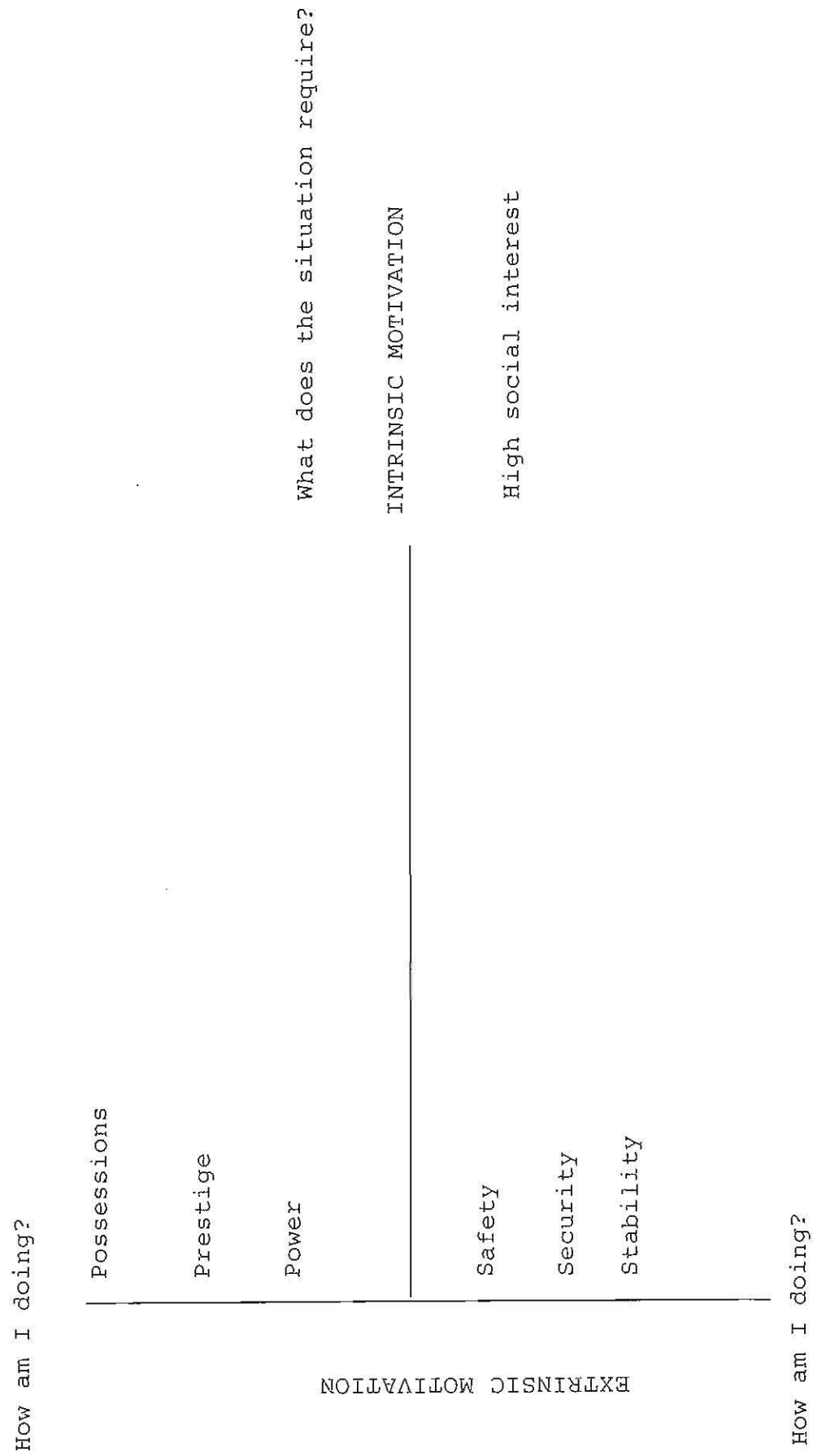
Because one's life-style offers latitude for behavioral choice, Adlerians do not propose an isomorphic relationship between life-style and vocational interests. Interests are behavioral choices that integrate one's life-style with one's life situation. "Inter est" is Latin for "to be between". Interests are symbolic expressions of life-style/life-situation relationships. As Carter (1940) noted in an article seminal to modern career counseling, interests are "solutions to the problems of growing up." Vocational interests are tools used to define and establish one's place as a member of the next generation. Environmental activities capable of crystallizing as interests are governed by the intrinsic pattern of the life-style. The line of movement through life broadly defines which work activities and roles can be interesting. Which activities actually become interests at any point in time depend upon contextual factors such as age, gender, social class, education, economic conditions, geographic locale, role models, and reinforcement history.

Career counseling focuses upon the motivational issues arising from life-style/work task integrations (i.e., work goals and values) before considering specific behavioral options (i.e., interests and coping strategies) in choice or adjustment situations. The socio-teleo-analytic approach to understanding work motivation interprets the events in a counselee's life as being structured by an underlying theme (i.e., lietmotif). The theme reveals itself through continuity of work values and goals over time and consistency of interests and behavior at any point in time. The career counselor investigates a counselee's work motivation to determine how s/he came to have his/her manifest vocational interests or work style and which alternative behavioral options are viable in light of career convictions emerging from the life-style.

In examining these motivational themes, the Adlerian counselor looks for mistaken notions (i.e., "guiding fictions") capable of causing the choice or adjustment problem presented to the counselor. The basic mistake is, of course, low social interest experienced as "I don't belong"; "I don't fit in"; or "I don't have what it takes to work". From this basic mistaken idea, and its idiosyncratic variations, the counselee sets his/her vocational coping rules. ("I have what it takes only when _____."; "I can work if _____.") When these life-style generated rules lack social interest, I call them career demands. When the rules reflect social interest, I call them career convictions.

Figure 1 portrays life movement relative to social interest as being vertical if extrinsically motivated and horizontal if intrinsically motivated. Applied to the life task of work, individuals concerned with "how" they are doing (i.e., extrinsically oriented) tend to view work as a problem and, therefore, to espouse career demands. Work is conceived of as a problem

Figure I



because egocentric individuals view it as a testing ground of personal worth. Rather than assuming that they have a place, they are out to prove their worth. People with prevalent inferiority feelings worry that their self-conceived worthlessness will be exposed and exploited so their work goal is to "avoid failure". Those who display superiority strivings view work as a battle ground where they have to defeat others to show their worth and, therefore, are quite ambitious and "success" oriented. Ambitious and retreating people (i.e., "how" oriented) all perceive work as a horse race which they expect to win or lose. This is in keeping with the French origins of the word career (i.e., "carriere" meaning race course). Ambition combined with low social interest yields a careerist who is chiefly interested in achieving, to the neglect of others. Because work is conceived of as an externally imposed problem, the work motivation of people with low social interest is primarily extrinsic. Power, position, and possession strivings propel their work behavior and underlie their career choice and adjustment problems. The need to espouse career demands logically follows from extrinsic work motivation. Because the locus of propulsion is external, such individuals "demand", "require", and "need" certain conditions from work. Unfortunately, such extrinsic motivations and career demands, even if gratified, do not produce happiness (Herzberg, 1966) because external agents inherently lack the power to make people happy.

Individuals more concerned with what they are doing (i.e., high social interest and intrinsic motivation) tend to conceive of work as an opportunity. Work is appreciated as an outlet for expressing one's life-style and as a vocational manifestation of selfhood. It is also perceived as a forum in which to mobilize one's talents and channel them into responsible, productive, and useful activity. Work is a place for the socially interested to cooperate and contribute to others while satisfying intrinsic motives and earning sustenance. Intrinsic work motives, emerging from a life-style informed by common-sense, promote career convictions. When one acts out of conviction, one can make him/herself happy. In terms of the community, one is really nobody until s/he makes behavioral commitments based upon inner convictions. One assumes his/her place in society by investing work with intrinsic motivation and being courageous enough to focus upon what work, not egoism, requires.

Career Demands vs. Convictions

The basic mistake in anyone's life-style concerns belongingness. An individual who believes that s/he does not belong, or belongs contingently, cannot really generate the courage to concentrate on work requirements. The basic difference distinguishing career demands and extrinsic motivation from career convictions and intrinsic motivation to work is one's sense of belonging. If belongingness is assumed, a person can concentrate on responsibly integrating his/her life-style with work require-

ments rather than floundering in attempts to discover a place where s/he is welcome. If, however, belongingness is denied, questioned, or provisional, then the individual imposes upon work career demands that serve to safeguard self-esteem. When an individual decides s/he does not belong, s/he may try to succeed in order to prove s/he should belong or may try to avoid failure in order to stall confirmation that s/he does not belong.

The writer has conceptualized a parallel set of six career demands and convictions which are useful in assessing life-style origins of counselees' career concerns. It would be helpful for the reader to preface career demands with phrases such as "I do not belong at work so I am _____" or "I belong at work if I am _____." Career concerns may be prefaced with "I belong at work and so I _____."

The typology of career demands and convictions is portrayed in Figure 2 to correspond with the "movement" scheme utilized in Figure 1. In considering the career demands on the vertical axis, the reader should keep in mind that the further a demand is placed from the horizontal axis representing social interest, the more discouraged is the underlying life-style whether it be behaviorally manifest in inferiority or superiority movement.

1. ABSENT VS. PRESENT

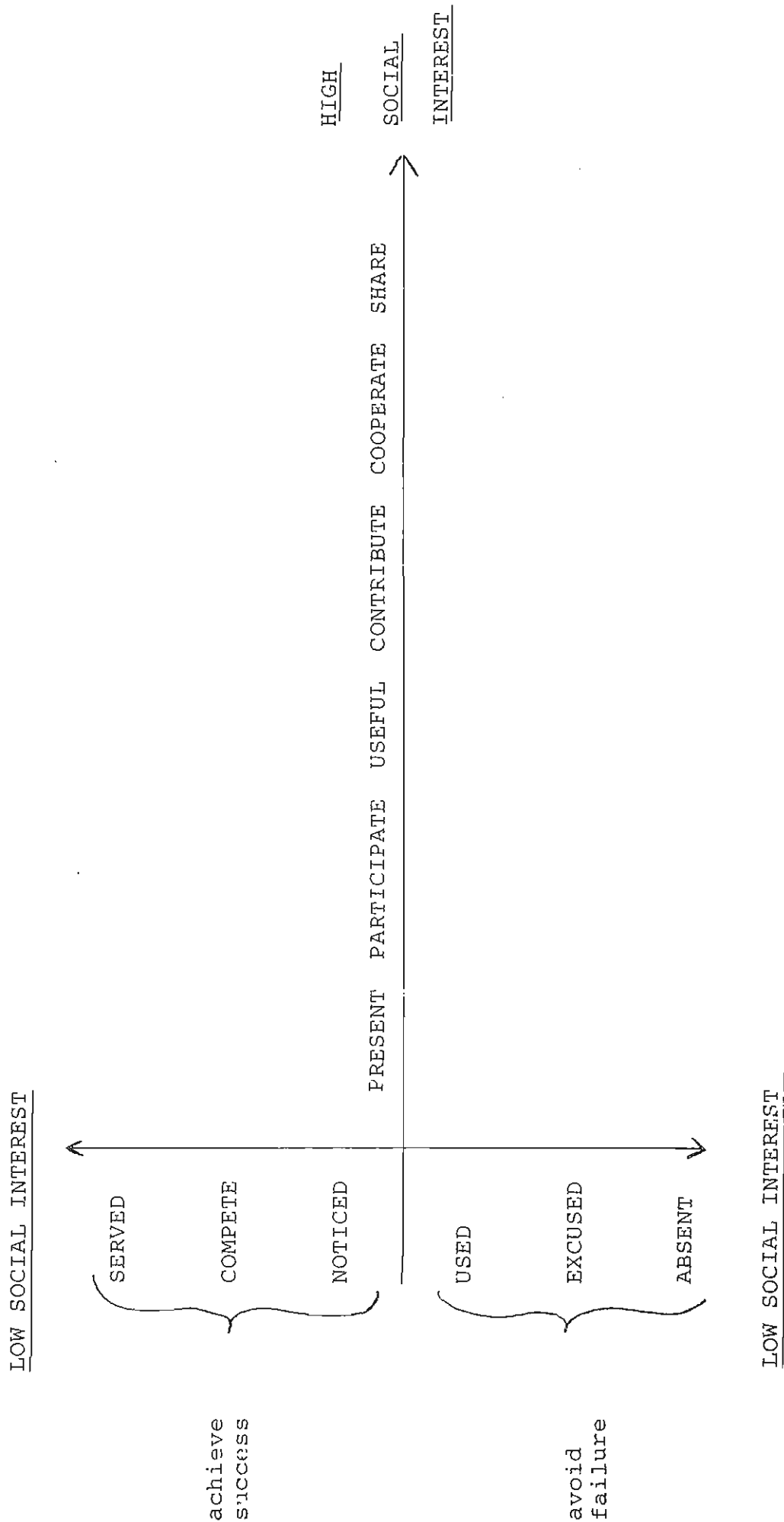
People who believe that they do not belong evince the deepest levels of work discouragement. They demand to be absent from work lest their vulnerability be traumatized. To be absent, they may lose themselves in a world of private sense (psychosis), elicit pampering so they do not have to work (neurosis), or "pull jobs" lacking social interest (psychopathy, delinquent,). Such discouraged people do not usually present themselves for career counseling but often do become career counselees at the behest of judges, physicians, psychologists, and social workers. The counselor's challenge is to convince the absent that they do have a place and belong at work. With this belief, they may eventually share the conviction to be present at work.

2. EXCUSED VS. PARTICIPATE

Individuals slightly less discouraged recognize that others expect them to belong at work, but they are not convinced that work is anything more than a necessary evil which others should perform. Often they utilize real or imagined physical or emotional deficiencies to be excused from work. Usually such counselees feel inadequate to shoulder the responsibilities of work and avoid their anticipated embarrassment by not working or by minimizing attendance at work. When seeking counseling, they may implicitly want the counselor to endorse their excuse rather than help them encounter work. A counselor can usually encourage

Figure II

TYPOLGY OF CAREER MOTIVATION



these counselees to participate in work by helping them perceive that they are "good enough" for what work requires of them but not "enough" for what they require of work (i.e., confirmation of worth).

3. USED VS. USEFUL

With slightly less discouragement, counselees can believe that they belong at work but they assume they are there to be used by powerful others or society. Their inferiority feelings and sense of discouragement actually set them up to be exploited and manipulated at work (e.g., "yes" men and women). The challenge for the career counselor is to help such counselees appreciate that rather than being used, they may want to become useful at work. When they focus on being useful, counselees are free to employ life-style insights to select congruent work because compatible jobs offer the greatest personal opportunities to be useful.

4. NOTICED VS. CONTRIBUTE

As the typology moves vertically across the horizontal axis, it shifts from counselees avoiding failure and inferiority to those seeking success and superiority. Ambitious counselees demand that work be a place where they are noticed, admired, and/or appreciated. They will work if they are attended to. Such workers need continual reassurance that they belong and think that they count only if other keep busy with them. Their career choice and adjustment difficulties, of course, reflect their demands for narcissistic supplies. The counselor's challenge is to turn their demands for attention into convictions that they can contribute. The counselor will usually be quite helpful to such counselees by reformulating their "being goals" into "doing goals" (e.g., "I want to be a great artist" into "I want to paint").

5. COMPETITIVE VS. COOPERATIVE

More discouraged individuals demand more than attention at work. They claim work must be a place where they can compete. They are willing to belong in the "jungle" or "dog-eat-dog" world of work as long as they can compete with co-workers. The counselor's challenge is to help such counselees change their demands to be "winners" into convictions that they can cooperate. This may involve challenging their belief that to cooperate means to lose. The counselor may reduce their "performance anxiety" by showing them that in competitive occupations no one is assured of a place. Fundamentally, the counselor attempts to persuade counselees that real victory is to actualize one's potential in concord with fellow workers and that the only useful competition is with one's own previous performance.

6. SERVED VS. SHARE

Individuals whose discouragement is great may display endless superiority strivings. They may demand that they belong at work only if others recognize their superior worth and serve them (e.g., follow their leadership, seek their opinion, defer to their choices). The counselor's challenge is to help such counselees question why they must always be the boss, have the last word, or be in control. If they can learn to accept their "weakness" (e.g., tender feelings, doubts, etc.), they may learn to appreciate that the truly strong are generous and that their is nothing as strong as gentleness. As their ability to take a multiplicity of perspectives increases, they can assume the conviction that work is a place to share.

The above discussion of career demands and convictions has rested upon distinctions between the farther ends of each continuum. It should be explicitly noted that there are a series of positions (degrees) along each continuum that are espoused by counselees.