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ABSTRACT

        To understand how work, love, and learning are
interrelated in adults' lives, data were collected in two ways:
through a life-history type instrument and through in-depth
interviews with 19 men and women. A life event framework was chosen
to illustrate the broad constructs of work and love. Respondents
identified in two columns major life events from year to year in the
areas of work and love; they rated each year for each domain as
having been a "good," "okay," or "bad" year. These data were graphed
with time as the horizontal axis and the rating as the vertical axis.
The result was a dual-vector visual representation of each
respondent's pattern of love and work. Respondents also identified
significant learning events and the year of their occurrence. The
life/learning event form was distributed to over 400 adults in
graduate or continuing education courses in North America; 19
respondents who had completed the form were interviewed. Three broad
patterns of interaction between the work and love domains were
detected in the data: (1) a parallel pattern in which work and love
vectors moved together; (2) a second pattern in which one domain
remained steady while the other fluctuated; and (3) a pattern of
divergence--if one was high, the other was low, the vectors seeming
to flow independent of or in opposition to each other. The greatest
number of learning events occurred when both work and love were rated
"good." (YLB)

WORK, LOVE, AND LEARNING IN ADULT LIFE

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When asked what it meant to be a mature, healthy adult, Freud is
reported to have said that maturity is the capacity to work and to
love. Certainly these are the central social and psychological
forces in adult life, and they have been studied extensively,
usually separately, although recent attention has been given to
how to balance the two. There has been little research, however,
on the interaction of the two domains. For example, do things
need to be going well in both arenas for one to feel productive?
Do activity and energy in one area stimulate activity in the
other? Or is the energy devoted to one at the expense of the
other? Further, how is learning related to the interaction of
work and love? Does more learning occur when things are going
well, or when times are difficult? What role does learning play
in development? The purpose of this study was to examine how work
and love interact, and how the interaction is related to learning
in adult life.

The most extensive discussion of the concepts of work and love can
be found in Smelser and Erikson (1980). Empirical research on the
interaction of love and work is limited. Baruch, Barnett, and
Rivers (1983) studied 300 women to find out what contributed to
their sense of well-being. They found that employed, married
women with children had a high sense of well-being, achieving a
sense of mastery from their work and a sense of pleasure from
their relationships. Likewise, Vaillant's (1977) longitudinal
study of Harvard men found that those with the best mental health
had "sustained relationships with loving people" (p. 337) and
achieved in their work.

Methodology

Since the focus of our study was to understand how work, love, and
learning are interrelated in adults' lives, a qualitative design
was chosen as the most appropriate means of investigating this
question. Data were collected in two ways: through a life-
history type instrument described below and through in-depth
interviews with 19 men and women.

A life event framework was chosen to operationalize the broad
constructs of work and love. Life events are noteworthy
occurrences, "benchmarks in the human life cycle" (Sugarman, 1986,
p.131). Respondents were asked to identify, in two columns, major
life events from year to year in the areas of work and love. Work
was defined as "noteworthy work experiences, paid or volunteer;
formal education" and love was broadly defined as "interpersonal
relationships, family events; social life; leisure activities."

Once these life events were listed, respondents were asked to subjectively rate each year for each domain as having been a "good," an "OK," or a "bad" year. For example, for the year 1976 one man wrote "dropped out of college" under the work column and rated it "bad"; in the love column of the same year the respondent wrote "married" and rated it "good." Respondents were then asked to graph these data, with time as the horizontal axis and the evaluation as the vertical axis. The result is a dual-vector visual representation of each respondent's pattern of love and work. On the second page of the instrument, respondents were asked to identify significant learning events and the year of their occurrence.

This life/learning event form was distributed to over 400 adults in graduate or continuing education courses in North America. In addition, we interviewed 19 respondents who had completed the form and who had volunteered to be interviewed. The final sample consists of 405 adults ranging in age from 20 to 62, with the average age of the participants being 37.6 years. Of the total sample, 112 or 27.7% are men and 293 or 72.3% are women. The sample is predominately white (82%) and wel' educated (88% are college educated).

We considered the data from this form to be like diary or journal entries documenting, to some extent, a personal life history. Thus both the graphs and the interviews were treated as qualitative data and were analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Findings

Three broad patterns of interaction between the work and love domains were detected in our data. There is a parallel pattern (n=158) (Fig.1) in which work and love vectors move together; change in one domain is reflected by change in the other. In the second pattern (n=107) (Fig.2) one domain remains steady while the other fluctuates. The third pattern (n=140) (Fig.3) is one of divergence; if one is high, the other is low, and the vectors seem to flow independent of or in opposition to each other.

FIGURE 1. PARALLEL   FIGURE 2. STEADY/FLUCTUATING   FIGURE 3. DIVERGENT
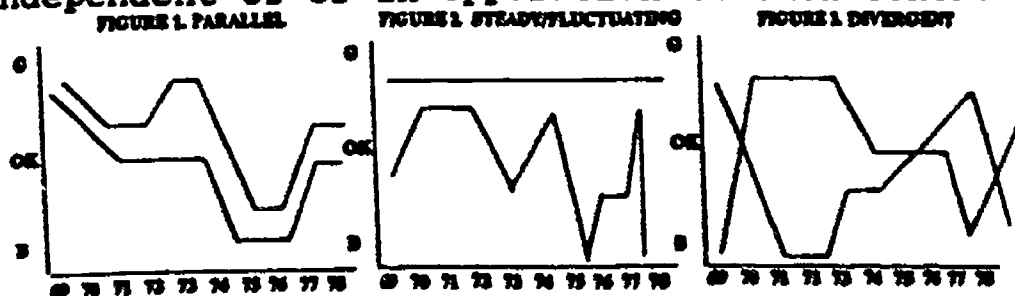
Our interview data revealed that for each of the three patterns there are several factors unique to each pattern that explains the nature of the interaction. In the parallel pattern, for example, there is a conscious effort to keep the two domains in balance. In the steady/fluctuating pattern, dips in the fluctuating domain, rather than pulling down the steady domain, appear to reinforce the stable character of that domain. In the divergent pattern,

achieving control through work creates a sense of stability.
Interestingly, we found no differences in the distribution of
these patterns by sex.

significant learning events were coded as to where they occurred
within each person's graph. The greatest number of learning
events (600) occurred when both work and love were rated "good."
When both domains were rated "OK," 112 learning events were
reported. When things were going badly in both domains, only 63
learning events occurred. From our interview data we learned that
while more learning occurs in good times, the nature of learning
in bad times is somewhat different in character. Difficult times
appear to generate major, transformative learning experiences.

Summary

Three distinct patterns of work and love were discovered through a
qualitative analysis of 405 life-event graphs and 19 interviews.
Further, significant learning intersects with these work/love
interactions with more learning occurring in good times than bad.

Our study has implications for practitioners in human services--to
psychologists, educators, counselors, social workers, and others
who work towards the personal growth and development of adults.
By facilitating reflection on both domains of love and work,
defined in the broadest possible way to include a vast range of
adult experience, and to reflect on significant learning from
those life experiences, individuals are being asked to attend to
all aspects of their life at one time. Only then can they begin
to see the connections between the different aspects of their
lives and to note patterns of behavior that link or separate the
domains. Such a panoramic view affords an important opportunity
for significant personal growth.

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