

## Sample Reflective Case Analysis



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### Reflective Case Analysis

Working at Mount Holyoke College as a Laboratory Director and Instructor, I manage the work of over 200 students. Although I am often very busy, almost to the point of overwhelming at times, I can honestly say that I love my job. I get so much energy out of being involved in so many different aspects of my workplace. On a daily basis, I switch roles. Some days I am co-teaching a graduate honors research course, while other days I am working with first-year students introducing them to statistical analysis. In addition, I also serve as a research consultant for the psychology and education departments on my campus, I cover classes for faculty while they are away at conferences, and I supervise graduate teaching assistants. Having such a dynamic position, I have an opportunity to develop many skills, such as teaching, supervising, and analyzing data. However, despite gaining much enjoyment and energy from my work, I would describe my current career stage as stuck.

Although I enjoy covering classes for faculty and I enjoy supporting the research interests of others with my consulting work, I would prefer teaching my own classes and pursuing my own research interests. I feel as though I have hit a barrier and that to advance further in my career interests that I need to earn a doctoral degree. Baumgartner and Merriam (1999) acknowledge in much of their work on adult learners that other factors such as culture and class intersect to influence aspects of adult life. In their text, for example, Baumgartner and Merriam illustrate this relationship in a story about a Jewish woman whose culture and class influenced her upbringing in New York where she felt, “floated between the two groups, never knowing where [she] belonged” (Baumgartner & Merriam, 1999, p. 56). Indeed, I agree with this assessment as my status as a working-class person has had a profound influence on many of the educational and career decisions that I have made in my life. During my life, I have similarly

felt as though I could float between, or belong to, two groups—a group that includes working-class individuals and a group that includes college-educated professionals.

I have found that my working-class background has been of benefit to me in many ways. For example, because of my need to work at such a young age to save money for my education, I was able gain much real world work experience before I even started college. However, in other ways, my working-class background has also been a barrier. For example, after graduating with my master's degree in psychology I was initially interested in pursuing a doctorate in Organization Studies at Boston College. However, despite my desire to continue with my studies, I could not financially afford to give up my employment to move out to Eastern Massachusetts and pursue a full-time program. In fact, pursuing a doctoral degree has been something that I thought might not ever be possible for me, as many of the programs that I researched did not offer the flexibility that I needed in order to manage full-time work with school. This is why I felt so blessed when I found out about American International College's low-residency program. Unlike, many of the other programs that I had investigated, this program offered me an opportunity to continue working in my career while pursuing a higher education.

The most influential factors in my career path have been, first, my desire to keep growing as an individual, and, second, my mentor Dr. Becky Wai-Ling Packard, who was a professor that I met during my last semester as an undergraduate student at Mount Holyoke College. Becky encouraged me to apply to Mount Holyoke's graduate program in psychology and she offered to be my thesis advisor. In addition to supporting my education as my thesis advisor, she also offered me a graduate research assistant position in her laboratory. She was someone who believed in me and gave me the opportunity to grow as a student and a professional.

Most importantly, Becky was always very sensitive of my need to work a second job,

which was at an aerospace factory at the time, to help pay for my studies. Similar to the suggestion of Caffarella and Clark (1999), who state, “we must take difference seriously” (p. 100), Becky was serious in her commitment to assist me by offering me a flexible work schedule in her research laboratory. Had she not given me the flexibility that I needed to make my financial life stable while I was in graduate school, I believe that my career would not have followed the trajectory that it did.

Upon completion of my master’s degree, Becky offered me a position as a Senior Research Associate in her laboratory and I was able to gain much valuable research experience. When my grant appointment as a Senior Research Associate was ending, she again encouraged me to pursue my current position as a Laboratory Director and Instructor at Mount Holyoke College. Through her continual support, honest advice, and constructive criticisms she has been a very influential factor in shaping my current career path.

I have a number of supports that enhance my professional growth. These supports include having a flexible work schedule, having a husband who is supportive of my educational aspirations, and having access to student loans. Although my current position as a Laboratory Director and Instructor is very demanding on my time, I have much autonomy in terms of designing my work schedule. This freedom gives me an opportunity to manage my school demands more easily. For example, if I need to leave work early to complete a school assignment or to attend a residency, then I am able to do so without a problem. In addition to having a supportive workplace, I also have a supportive husband who gives me the space I need to complete my studies. Lastly, I am fortunate in that I am able to get student loans so that I may pursue an education that I hope will enhance my growth as a working professional.

Currently, the greatest challenge that I face in thriving in my career is my financial situation. Although student loans make it possible for me to pursue my educational goals, they also create a financial strain on my family. This strain has me working a second job as a research assistant within a cognitive research laboratory so that I may begin paying off the loans. I feel that the time that I spend working at my second position steals time away from when I could be writing and building my credentials as a scholar. Working this second job adds extra stress into my life, but I feel compelled to do it because I do not want to be in debt for many years to come. Thus, I consider my second job as a necessary task that will help me to reach an important personal goal, which is attaining my doctoral degree. A degree which I hope will help me to achieve my professional goals.

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References

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