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AUTHOR Gerlicher, Cathie
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ABSTRACT

Career theory is not a new topic, but one with an interesting past. The theories have been developed through working with men in the early days of the study of careers, modified to add women, and then modified even more for men and women in transition. Making a career decision is not a single event that takes place only in one's early adulthood, but might happen on other occasions during the life span. As the theory changes, different considerations are evident in the research. Much interest is focused on career transitions and the life change involved in breaking a career pattern. Factors such as changing economies, role expectations, more women in higher education and the workplace have caused theories to be modified and changed. Two implications of a study that investigated what women had done when faced with midlife career changes and how they made their choices were noteworthy and are as follows: (1) the socialization of girls and women and the correlation to their career choice and (2) the apparent need for flexible programming for women. The women in the study who initially focused on being "stay-at-home-mothers" have all chosen traditional women's occupations--a typical pattern according to Gottfredson's theory about early socialization and the tendency for women to choose gender-acceptable occupations. Career planning and vocational maturity need to consider the whole woman and all her needs, which is difficult when the flexibility of time is not available. (Contains 77 references.) (YLB)

Older women and their career decisions and compromise

Cathie Gerlicher

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Cathie Gerlicher
61155 River Bluff Trail
Bend, OR 97702
541-382-4773
Cathie@gerlicher.com

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A metaphor for career change in later life might be the kaleidoscope. When the colored rocks in the tube are re-arranged the view will change to something different. When older women re-enter the workplace, either from a homemaker occupation or having broken away from current employment for various reasons, they are experiencing a transition. This transition can be a time of personal reflection and change. This paper reviews the findings from a study of a few older women who entered a program, sponsored by a community college, to re-examine their skills, learn some new skills, look at occupations, and make a decision about possible new employment. They all had the opportunity to change their lives by examining their skills, interests, and values from an adult perspective.

As a community college administrator my interest was in the change. By studying the theories of career development, decision-making, and career compromise, it was interesting to see the layers change and unfold as the stories by my participants were told. There is a great deal of literature on career theory. Its history goes back to the early 1900's when the interest was primarily men and their career choice. Women's career decisions entered the theories in the 1950's as a more serious topic and since the 1950's several theories developed about careers and ways to help people make good choices starting with Super (1957a), Holland (1973), and Roe, (1957). Others followed in later years that based theory on these early leaders.

I wanted to investigate what other women had done when faced with mid-life career changes and how they made their choices. I also wanted to understand when women change from homemaking occupations into the paid occupations what choices

they made and how they made them. As this issue was examined, I reviewed many articles relating to the methods women use in their career development. The range of studies is quite broad and many articles overlap with similar information. The information has been filtered for this study and a broad overview has been provided.

When faced with career decisions, people often look to their families and their current socio-economic environment in order to make choices. Women, in the past, have typically chosen careers that were dominated by women (Eccles, 1987; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Sorensen & Winters, 1975). Women tended to look toward their mothers as role models for work and her mothers' employment history and status may influence her daughter's perception of the female gender role as it may shape occupational behavior. Daughters who identify with their fathers seemed to choose more "masculine" occupations, and girls identifying with their mothers tend to choose more "feminine" occupations (Auster & Auster, 1981; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Eccles, 1987; Nevill & Damico, 1978; Osipow, 1975; Tong, 1998; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998). In one study (Betz & Fitzgerald 1987) the relationship of women and advanced degrees or a non-traditional career that was found to be more common if their mothers had advanced degrees or non-traditional careers, but it was also found that the influence of the household promoted decision-making to follow the occupational choice based on parental relationships. Women can find themselves in role-conflicts because of traditional male and female occupational stereotypes and these stereotypes can make choices more difficult regardless of gender (Auster & Auster, 1981; Betz, 1982; Gottfredson, 1981; Nevill & Damico, 1978; Peoples, 1975; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998). Stereotypical women's jobs tend to be lower paying with few or no benefits and very few opportunities

for growth (Andersen & Collins, 1995; Drentea, 1998; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Gutek & Larwood, 1987). This pattern tended to continue as women aged. Demographic data indicated that some older women made their choices using familiar stereotypes (Auster & Auster, 1981) and those older women were often homemakers who were entering into the job market for the first time or who were re-entering the job market after an absence (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Their choices reflected expectations learned from their families and their own social expectations.

More occupations are stereotyped as “male” occupations than are “female,” and many occupations of higher status or prestige tended to be male (Auster & Auster, 1981; Diamond, 1987; Drentea, 1998; Eccles, 1987; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Gottfredson, 1981; Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Stockard & Johnson, 1992; Super, 1957b). Historically, men made up the early work force, and currently, the majority of workers are still in sex-segregated jobs. To equalize the gender ratios it is estimated that 77 to 96 percent of the workforce would need to change jobs (Drentea, 1998). According to a study done by Fitzgerald and Betz (1983) career aspirations of the young women at that time continued to focus on stereotypically female occupations and were clearly over represented in lower-level and lower-paying occupations and positions. They also noted that women’s intellectual capacities and talents were not necessarily reflected in their educational and occupational achievements and the women’s choices were based on lower levels of ability than were males with comparable abilities. This continued to reflect that making decisions based on social expectations was still a normal method.

Gutek and Larwood (1987) indicated that in times past men had careers and women only had temporary employment. In many families women were expected to take

temporary jobs just until they were married. In early occupational history only a few occupations were available to women, and because of those past restrictions, certain occupations became women's work and that stereotyping has been slow to change. Now that women are a larger portion of the workforce than ever before (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Sullivan, 1992), interest in women's career planning has increased. Politically, large amounts of both state and federal dollars were spent on short-term training programs, and the pressure was on to "validate the funds" (Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, 1993) by providing employment opportunities for women in a variety of occupations.

Occupational stereotyping begins at an early age for girls and can create lifetime barriers for women in making choices that are suitable to their goals (Eccles, 1987; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Gottfredson, 1981; Thome, 1994). Children partially rely on their peers for validating self worth, and this reliance and influence can shape future plans. Adolescence is also a time of learned stereotyping when the images of male and female roles are developed. Fitzgerald and Betz (1982) and Gottfredson (1981) also noted that children were able to clarify occupations starting at an early age. As they moved into high school they were fairly accurate with the categories of gender specific occupations. Heavily weighted on the feminine side of the sex type rating of occupations were nurse, librarian, secretary, receptionist, social worker, and file clerk. On the far extreme of the masculine scale were construction worker, miner, auto mechanic, fisherman, groundskeeper, company president, engineer, and sales manager. And far more occupations were listed on the masculine side. Some of the gender-neutral occupations

included, short order cook, real estate agent, writer, artist, journalist, psychologist, and sales.

Older women also looked to their peers for career choices as well as occupations that fit their social image (Auster & Auster; 1981; Betz, 1982; Gottfredson, 1981). Gottfredson's (1981) study indicated that people generally share the same stereotypical view of occupations, but when asked which occupation they might choose the answers were more diverse. The differences were centered on gender, age, intelligence, social and economic status, race, and religion. People may share common views of occupations, but they do not always choose them based on the same values. Peoples self images may differ even if the occupational image is a good match.

In a recent article about career reentry for women, one of the women interviewed stated, "There comes a time when you realize that you can do better" (Husain, 1999, p. 20). She realized that she could make a change. From an economic perspective, there has been a movement to help women who are heads of households improve their job status. When women are successful in the work environment, their success reflects on the family (Women's Bureau Department of Labor, 1993).

Women often have different needs, interests, and barriers than men when they seek ways to return to the job market. A study conducted in the United Kingdom, Jeynes (1992) found that women returning to the work place, after being away for an extended time, did not value their own skills and could not recognize the new skills they had learned through life experiences. The women tended to look at their skills as though no changes had occurred in their lives and as if they were as unskilled as they were when

they left high school. Women may lack personal confidence when they have been either out of the job market for a period of time or in a job less than suitable for their skills.

In a different study, adults in career transition were found to be generally unaware of potential jobs and had a lack of direction in making career changes. They were not practiced in decision-making and may lack knowledge of resources on more current jobs and positions. Many times adults were confused about how to do career planning and were not clear on where services were available (Zunker, 1990).

One of the problems older adults have in their job search is not having kept pace with the changes in the occupations. This also plays a role in women having difficulty in vocational searches. If they do not understand jobs and the job market, do not realize their own skills, and have lost touch with technology their options continue to be fewer.

This focus of this paper was to provide a literature review that can help the reader understand more about women in the workplace, or transitioning to the workplace, and how to get past the barriers that hold back decisions, and if compromise took place. The earlier paragraphs reveal a great deal about women and how important vocational maturity is. For good career decisions people need to have confidence in their skills and abilities and understand the job market.

When women first came into the focus of career development theorists, many were homemakers. Using a battery of interest inventories, researchers found these women scored high on the stereotypical women's careers such as secretary or teacher (generally those types of jobs were the only ones available to them), and women who were in professional careers seemed to score higher in the typical male-dominant professional careers than women who were not in the workplace (Auster & Auster, 1981). After

several years of study, researchers found that women who had homebound interests were no less committed to careers than those in the professional fields (Larwood & Gutek, 1987; Ornstein & Isabella, 1990). They could not make generalizations that women interested in homemaking or homebound careers were not as committed to “meaningful work” as those in paid occupations (Diamond, 1987). Studies of women’s career interests changed after World War II when researchers began to look at women’s career development and its relation to work in a broader way (Ornstein & Isabella, 1990).

Diamond (1987), Eck (1993), Frusher and Rountree (1989), Illfelder (1980), Lucas, Skokowski, and Ancis (2000), Rountree and Frusher (1991), and Valdez and Gutek (1987) proposed that home responsibilities could be barriers to career development. Today women are still primarily responsible for maintaining the home and for childrearing, despite their level of outside career commitment. Some other reasons for career and relationship barriers include fear of success, traditional sex-role expectations, home roles and career conflict, and low self-esteem (Lucas, Skokowski, & Ancis, 2000). Super in 1957 was among the first to consider women’s needs in a serious way. His insight into women’s multiple roles set the foundation for understanding women’s complex career decisions.

Larwood and Gutek (1987) proposed another career theory for women to help sort out information regarding many of the aspects of career choice. Some of the topics discussed include career preparation, opportunities available in the society or community, the influence of marriage, pregnancy and children, and age. Career theories were developed to help understand all of the issues that women need to consider with career development. Using counseling techniques or specific classroom training, many of these

topics can be covered in training for decision-making. All of the variables need to be considered in looking at how women and men may make more informed decisions.

Lucas, Skokowski, and Ancis (2000) studied young college women seeking career counseling and found similar results. Family influences, cultural influences, and “messages” received by young women caused confusion in career choice that in the case of this study led to depression. These “messages” come from parents, teachers, religious connections, and the media to “teach” girls to emphasize home and family pursuits. The conflict of the message from home and either spouses or boyfriends can create barriers to decision-making.

Decision-Making Strategies and Methods

Super (1957b) described a method of decision-making in career development and that is by chance. He referred to it as the “accidental theory.” In his early studies Super (1957b) found that nearly one-fourth of the work force discovered their occupation by accident or by chance. Factors such as socioeconomic status, political environment, health, and family pressure affect the accidental method of career choice. Chance, or the accidental theory, is defined as external events that take place in a person’s life. Those events play a role in a career-decision that might not be a factor for someone else. One example might be that of a serious drug addiction that is overcome by good counseling. This experience might be the deciding factor for the person to enter into the field of counseling. This seems to be a recognized method of decision-making. Even though this is perhaps not a desired method, it is one of the ways people end up in careers. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) found additional research in chance theory and pointed out that it was much more difficult to predict vocational outcome with the random factors involved

in chance decision-making. Random factors, to them, could include chance encounters, unintended meetings of persons of potential influence, accidents or injuries, and other life events. However, it can lead to satisfying vocational outcomes.

There is a range of literature on decision-making (e.g., Arroba, 1977; Biggers, 1971; Gelatt, 1962; Hilton, 1962; Janis & Mann, 1977; Kaldor & Zytowski, 1969; Pryor & Taylor, 1986; Taylor & Pryor, 1985; Vermeulen & Minor, 1998). Janet Armstrong (1981) stated that some decisions are characterized by their irreversibility because of the extent of change. Some of the data she collected indicated that older adults seeking career changes and attending school for training were the most successful in their searches. Those decisions were based on rational choice using wide ranges of alternatives and broad bases of information. Decision-making is a skill that can be taught to all students and can be used during the lifespan.

Helping women learn to make career decisions is one of the goals of career guidance counseling. Gelatt and Clark (1967) suggest that a good decision is one in which the decider considers alternatives and is willing to accept the responsibility for the consequences; thus part of the decision making process is accepting consequences. During the review of the literature about women returning to work (e.g., Abbot, 1995; Astin, 1998; Astin, 1984; Auster & Auster, 1981; Betz, 1982; Burghardt & Gordon, 1990; Drentea, 1998; Gerlicher, 1998; Greenhaus & Simon, 1977; Gutek & Larwood, 1985; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Husain, 1999; Luzzo 1994; Nevill & Damico, 1978; Sverko & Vizek-Vidovic, 1995), women in the welfare system (e.g., Abbott, 1995; Gerlicher, 1998; Gorback, 1994; Mangano & Corrado, 1978; U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Wheaton & Robinson, 1982), and women and literacy (e.g., U.S. Department of

Education, 1994; Wheaton & Robinson, 1982), one of the apparent themes was that strong cultural and family feelings and desires influenced women's decisions. If a decision needed to be made that might not be accepted by the family, that decision might be too difficult to make.

Another consideration in decision-making is the influence of gender-role beliefs. Vermeulen and Minor (1998) studied influences on the career decisions of rural women. They found that gender beliefs influenced career decisions. Role expectations for wives and mothers when related to expectations of work found those expectations came ahead of information gathering. Even when occupational choices were of interest, family expectations came first. Another strong source of influence for women was that of parents and family, which was reported in other studies on women's career decisions (e.g. Greenhaus & Simon, 1976; Greenhaus & Simon, 1977; Luzzo, 1999; Pryor & Taylor, 1986; Stonewater, 1987). Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) also stated that women's choices about work continued to be connected to their family and women were faced with the dual role of outside work as well as homemaking. This examination of different theories supports that people make their decisions based on a variety of reasons, choices, circumstances, family pressures, and cultural pressures.

Another issue in the process of decision-making was the commitment to work. Darrell Luzzo (1994) stated that a person's commitment to the work place played a significant role in their career decision. Students who had clear goals, were motivated to achieve their goals, and had strong interest in the workplace were more successful. Women attending college tended to be more committed to work than men who attended college. Luzzo (1994) also stated that women were more likely to seek career

advancement through personal improvement and hard work and could make strong commitments. Women who entered programs with a strong commitment to their goals were also more likely to finish (Abbott, 1995).

Herr and Cramer (1984) outlined four basic steps in making decisions that could help summarize all the other theories.

1. First step is the problem of getting started. This includes lack of awareness of both the process and the need for a decision.
2. The second step is information gathering. This can be a quick scan with too little information or overload with too much information. There needs to be a balance between gathering information and how it will be used.
3. The next step is compromise and looking at alternatives. This includes the time spent in evaluating options, planning how alternatives can fit into one's lifestyle, and finally making selections. Some initial choices end up being unrealistic. As alternatives are considered, then other choices become available.
4. The next step is making a plan. With any planning, setting clear goals and gathering additional information is critical (p.100).

All four of these steps are mentioned in many of the decision-making strategies. They are important in the process of choosing the right career and require that decision-making follow through to step four to be complete.

Arroba (1977) classified several styles of decision-making. They are listed below.

1. Logical. A decision where the important feature is that the situation is coldly and objectively appraised, and the choice is made on the basis of what is the best alternative.
2. No thought. No objective consideration is given to the making of the choice. This could be because the choice is a routine matter, frequently encountered, or viewed as unimportant. It can also be impulsive or a rapid decision with no objective consideration.
3. Hesitant. This covers all the situations where the decider postpones the moment of final commitment to an alternative; inability to make the decision being experienced prior to the final choice. Covers agonizing, paralysis and delaying emotions for decisions.

4. Emotional. This is based solely on subjective preferences or feelings and what the person likes or wants. The final choice is the alternative that possesses the most emotional appeal.
5. Compliant. This covers decisions made in accordance with the perceived expectations either of the situation or of other people, or with self-imposed expectations. It covers decisions where concurrence with another person's prior decision occurs.
6. Intuitive. This is using an inner-oriented nature as the basis of choice as compared to the external orientation in the case of logical and compliant decisions. It is based on personal feeling of rightness or inevitability with no further explanation given (p. 149).

Identifying a style could help the decision-maker understand the process that went into the decision. It is equally important to look at the person and the situation in terms of their personal decision-making techniques so the decision can be better understood (Arroba, 1977).

Arroba (1977) also wrote about decision-making styles as both a description of an individual and of behavior. She described individuals as each having a particular way of behaving. That style can help predict how a person goes about making their decisions. An example was that a person with an impulsive personality might make impulsive decisions.

Another view of style was that each person has many decision-making styles and these various styles were used in different situations. A person may approach and arrive at a decision using a different one of the six styles depending on the circumstances at the time. Using different styles can be an effective part of teaching decision-making to teach students to evaluate their decision from different perspectives and hopefully consider more options.

The literature reviewed helps to understand the complexity of career decisions. Some decision-making factors are internal. They are based on education, social status,

self-esteem, and decision-making abilities. Other factors are external and they may be based on the demographics of the person's community, willingness to move, pressures from family members, and financial abilities.

Compromise and Transition

Gottfredson and Lapan (1997) discussed that children go through a developmental process where they eliminate entire sections of the occupational world that they consider not compatible with their self-concept. They learn about their socio-economic place in society and eliminate occupations they view unacceptable for people like they perceive they are. That elimination process is similar when viewing their gender and intelligence.

As children grow up they continue to reject certain occupational choices. First to be discarded was fantasy or make believe occupations and this stage was referred to as orientation to size and power stage (age 3-5). As they matured they eliminate all the occupations of the wrong sex type and this stage was referred to as the orientation to gender stage (6-8). They may never consider them again unless some type of intervention occurs.

Next was the elimination of positions that did not fit within their social status was the orientation to social valuation stage (9-13). These were occupations that children and their family might consider not high enough prestige. And finally beginning at age 14 was the orientation to internal, unique self stage where they have decided their social place. At this point they set their ceiling on aspirations based on their own perceived abilities. This sorting narrows the search by presenting fewer and possibly less attainable options (Gottfredson, 1981).

One critique of Gottfredson's theory was she did not describe how people learn about the masculine or feminine characteristics of occupations or how they learn what level of prestige is related to occupations. Gottfredson did emphasize the importance of self-concept and that there is a strong need to pick an occupation that fits one's gender self-concept, but according to Krumboltz and Nichols (1990) the method children used to learn this was not clear.

An article by Brott (1993) indicated that because career awareness starts at such an early age that interventions such as career related activities need to start with the younger children. She also suggested that teaching about atypical role models for elementary school ages might help eliminate the narrow fields of occupational choice due to sex type considerations.

The important issue in Gottfredson's work (1981) was that people discard good options for the wrong reasons. Some of the examples that Gottfredson provided were a talented musician might compromise to teach music instead of seeking a professional career. One might choose to be an auto mechanic rather than an engineer, or a sales person rather than a business owner. Compromise is backing away from or giving up what one might prefer. Another point that Gottfredson (1981) made was that people are likely to place more weight on their perceptions when pursuing occupations than to waste time on those not considered a good risk. People tend to balance their preferences with what they determine as possible. When perceptions are narrowly formed and guided into limited roles, it is more clear the influence one's self concept has on making choices.

Compromise is about making different choices and according to Gottfredson (1981) a career choice is very public and a presentation of one's self. She also mentioned

that gender self-concept will be the most strongly protected in the decision-making process followed by a person's social standing. She suggested that a person would sacrifice an interest in a field of work to maintain their perception of their sex type and prestige images.

Hesketh, Elmslie, and Kaldor (1990) examined Gottfredson's compromise theory and provided a new feature. Gottfredson's (1981) theory stated that people would consider occupations within an area determined by their acceptable levels of prestige and sex type. However Hesketh, Elmslie, and Kaldor (1990) found that interests have a higher priority than thought of by Gottfredson. Their study indicated that if an occupation was eliminated because of an unacceptable feature but was still of interest to the person, then it might be reintroduced under the definition of a different attribute and could then become an acceptable choice. Changing gender specific terms in occupational descriptions might do this. And another study by Sullivan and Mahalik (2000) recognized that gender is an important factor that influenced career counseling. They commented on the need for career interventions designed specifically for women as counselors typically underestimate the effects of social and gender constraints to women.

Additional studies of people making decisions showed that compromise was a key component. Pryor and Taylor (1985, 1986) found that students typically made compromises based on very specific factors. Those factors may include prestige, maintaining vocational interests, and occupational gender type. Hilton (1962) also noted that people tended to make decisions only when forced to. When we look at compromising in career decisions, these studies tend to confirm decision-making as a

means to resolve conflict. People generally prefer to avoid conflict; so sometimes avoiding a decision is really avoiding conflict.

Gati, Houminer, and Fassa (1997) discussed the value of learning to compromise in career choices. Many times career expectations were not workable due to environmental, physical, or monetary reasons, and people may need to settle for less than their original choice. Learning about compromise can lead to decisions that meet the students' needs and at the same time allow them to understand that the choices they made were the right ones. Students should learn to examine compromise against new choices. Finding out what a person wants out of a career while considering what approaches to take becomes the most reasonable way to find out if what has been determined was a good choice. Compromise can be a very difficult part of the career decision-making process. If values and history promote women doing women's work, then will the compromise or the change in their thinking be effective and how do they accept the change? Are women actually settling for less or has the decision been made based on new information? Super et al. (1957) indicated in the development of their career models that compromise could be part of the role-playing that a person does when evaluating career choices. People need the opportunity to "try on" the roles of careers they might be interested in. Trainers, instructors, or career counselors can facilitate this by using techniques such as information interviews, cooperative work experience, job shadowing, or other ways to view the career in a guided format.

Working from decision-making to career aspirations, Gottfredson (1981) described five stages of career decision-making. The first three stages were topics that have been expressed by others in the career development field. They include self-concept

recognition, matching occupational choices, and finally the occupational choice itself. Her theory went on to include accessibility of the occupation as part of choice. Accessibility can be defined as location of occupation, obstacles, and barriers. She continued with her model to describe step four as the acceptable alternatives (compromise) and finally aspiration or final choice. There are several different types of career compromises, but generally it becomes a way to cope with reality and of changing one's goals to adapt to the circumstances that stand in the way of the original choice. Donald Super (1953) noted that: "Surely this is the crux of the problem of occupational choice and adjustment: the nature of the compromise between self and reality, the degree to which and the conditions under which one yields to the other, and the way in which this compromise is effected" (p. 187). The occupations that people want and the jobs they finally choose may differ based on a variety of factors. People make choices based on a number of reasons and may not be aware of how they might compromise their potential socioeconomic status.

Gottfredson (1981) discussed three principles that describe types of information people look at concerning job accessibility. They include the following:

1. Attention focuses only on the occupations in one's social space.
2. Attention is confined largely to the implementation period or the specific time of the job search.
3. Readily available sources of information will be surveyed first and other sources may never be used. The primary sources include family, friends, and colleagues (p. 570).

When there is a mismatch between the person's choice of occupation and the jobs available, it means some type of compromise can occur and the person may end up in a position of less interest or one that might not be suitable

Gottfredson (1981) described three principles that were evident when compromise may be required. First was that gender self-concept may be the highest priority in career choice, even when the individual is interested in an occupation associated with the opposite gender. Gottfredson also described that children learn at an early age about gender specific stereotyping of occupations. This principle indicated that most people would move into a more gender acceptable choice if that value might be compromised.

The second principle indicated in her model was that many times the occupational exploration stops when a satisfactory choice has been found. Not often does the search continue until all resources have been examined. People may define an acceptable range of occupations and might stop with the first one found in the range. This again is compromise and many people might not continue on with the search.

The final principle was concerned with how people might accommodate to the compromise that they made. Sometimes this means changing the career aspiration to match the chosen job. High percentages of the respondents studied said their interests changed or they found the occupation by accident (Gottfredson, 1981) and (Super, 1953). All of these principles offer career counseling opportunities to encourage people to look further into career choice beyond the socially accepted occupations as well as evaluating more choices.

Interest in promoting non-traditional occupations for women is increasing. Gottfredson's (1981) study discussed changing some of the descriptions on interest tests to appeal more to women to break some of the stereotyping. But according to her self-concept theory interests are lower factors in self-concept and might make no difference in changing some of the gender beliefs that women have. The interest inventories show that

women prefer more feminine work even if they are interested in non-traditional occupations. People have a range of occupations they find potentially acceptable and are flexible within that range. They may not be willing to look outside of that range.

In my experience teaching career planning and the literature I have read, compromise is a large part of the career decision. Even though we would prefer our actions to happen quickly, waiting for an opportunity by attending school or training programs or moving into the career choice by promotions can be rewarding. Part of the training needs to be clear about compromise and that the wait to achieve personal goals can be worthwhile. As part of the work in career decision-making, understanding compromise is critical.

Self concept

Super's theory outlined how people attempt to implement their self-concept for career decisions. His theory also acknowledged that socioeconomic background and intelligence were important predictors of vocational choice. However, according to Gottfredson (1981) his theory ignored or minimized those predictors and focused on what she determined were weaker predictors the values and interests of both the decision-maker and/or her parents.

Gottfredson's theory was based on self-concept development and how she views herself when she projects herself into the future. It is her self-concept that helps to determine the picture that she might see. Gottfredson (1985) defined self-concept in two dimensions: identities and self-esteem. She referred to identities as her belief about herself and self-esteem has how she feels about herself. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) wrote that vocational self-esteem is related to the perception of the difficulty of an

occupation and may influence occupational choice. Lower self-esteem may contribute to her self-concept and then ultimately to the vocational choice.

Also according to Gottfredson (1985) self-concept is more than one's sense of social self, but included all aspects of a person including her view of her abilities, interests, personality, and her place in society. Self-concept also included occupational images or occupational stereotypes and was defined as a hierarchy. Her study stated that people were more concerned about protecting their preferred gender identities than about protecting the identities of social class, ability, etc. Gender self-concept included generalizations, fantasies, images from family and friends that started to develop at an early age. They may vary in accuracy based on a number of factors from which the images were formed. These preferences were developed through desirability of occupations and the job self-concept that was created.

She also discussed the "perceived accessibility" of an occupation where judgments were established about an occupation. Many factors go into this judgment such as geographic availability, perceptions of gender or other discrimination, ease of training, and knowledge or lack of knowledge about how to enter various occupations.

The major components to Gottfredson's (1981) self-concept theory were gender, social class background, intelligence and vocational interests, competencies, and values. They were incorporated into one's self-concept at different times during a person's early development.

For women it is those early years that occupations may be determined as appropriate or not. This is the gender portion of the self-concept theory when girls learn what women may or may not do both vocationally and socially.

The next area of Gottfredson's theory was acceptance or rejection of an occupation based on perceived prestige or within her social class and then ruling out occupations thought to be out of that image and her ability. This is an especially important factor in the role of educating young girls. A study done by American Association of University Women (1994), found girls tended to lose interest in math and science topics at middle school age. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) examined studies with girls and mathematics and concluded that socialization plays a role in girls not choosing to take additional mathematics classes outside of basic requirements. Considering both socialization factors in the home and the effect of middle school influence on less math or science education, girls are positioned in narrow views for occupational selection.

Then according to Gottfredson (1981), at the end of high school students begin to implement their choices based on the years of eliminating possibilities that they do not think match. When students make their choices based on all the input from schools, family, self-image, and other social factors their choices may already be limited.

Also mentioned in Gottfredson's (1981) theory of self-concept was when students leave high school to implement their choices they become more sensitive to the jobs most readily available. They balance the perceptions that had developed over their life including gender issues, social and prestige issues along with their image of their general abilities. The choice was to try and implement the best of the choices available.

In this theory of self-concept, the compromise takes place by sacrificing vocational interests first, and then job level with gender type last. Compromise continued until most people report being in the type of work they wanted. The fewer factors eliminated in the career choice the closer to the persons preferred self-concept.

In an article by Luzzo (1995), his research found that in college students most of the women were struggling with role conflict decisions as well as making career choices. He also discussed that women were more likely to consider the integration of both the occupational choice as well as the family role in that decision. This adds to the complexity of making the decision fit into the person's life.

Women in Transition

Women in transition and looking for employment are seeking both a challenge and meaning in work. The factors that might be motivating them could include a restructuring of their original career goals due to many reasons. They could also include a feeling of isolation from either peers or from the community or it could also include a feeling of lack of accomplishment. This group of women may have many expectations they are hoping to fill (Zunker, 1999).

Transition can be in the form of mid-life changes, lack of children in the home, financial, or health reasons. The numbers continue to grow as the economy changes due to downsizing or employment trends causing women to join the workforce. According to Brown (1995) planned transitions occur for two basic reasons. First was the lack of satisfaction if ones current job does not satisfy their values. The second could be a role conflict in the workplace. Either can lower the expectation of life and or job satisfaction and cause change. An unplanned transition is the job loss that is out of the person's control. Personal satisfaction is an important factor in transition and one that needs to be examined during the process of career change.

As women progress through education and seek employment, their training needs change and different job opportunities can arise. According to Burghardt and Gordon

(1990) and Eck (1993), there is a relationship between education and training to wages earned. Women typically enter into women's occupations (e.g., secretary, aide, etc) that are generally the lowest paying (Gorback, 1994). Women in these fields are seldom offered continued training opportunities to advance within the organization. As we look at the profile of women, we find that many midlife women (Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, 1993) are stuck in moderate paying jobs with little or no chance of moving up. They rarely have retirement plans and are very close to the poverty line. Any disruption in their lives can drastically affect them.

In a study done by Breese and O'Toole (1995) it was written that women were connected to the cause of their transition when choosing career options. Their choice of career options was directly related to past experiences and relationships. Some of their examples showed that working women in transition made the change to enhance their job satisfaction and ability to change for better work. Women who transition from the home to paid employment do so to supplement their family income or make leisure transitions. This is another indication that the role women learn in work and home can be a key indicator in how they make decisions about possible careers.

An interesting study done by Bejian and Salomone (1995) outlined Supers' stage theory as it applied to career development. They suggested that Supers' theory was developed in a time of generally a single career. As the job market changed the possibility of adding an additional stage in his theory might be evident. This stage was labeled as a renewal stage. Renewal could take place at a time during Supers' maintenance stage. The change occurs when individuals make midcareer reevaluations and possible changes. Renewal is about re-evaluating values and career goals and

understanding concerns that might affect their self-concept. Career changes and transitions are becoming more common as people seek change in their work either planned or unplanned.

The Department of Labor, as well as other agencies, has funded training for women in transition. Their success might relate to the goals of being self-sufficient. This is attempting to keep them out of the welfare system and to also allow them to become successful role models for their children. Those women typically were in the 35-to-54-year old age range, and they had a great deal of influence on the success of their families as well as on their own personal success. The population demographics collected in 1993 showed the 35 to 54-age range as a large age group of people in the workforce. Working with this group not only helped provide a stable work environment, it could teach their families the value of good career decisions (Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, 1993). There is a great deal of information about women in transition, displaced homemakers, and women in poverty. For the purpose of this study the literature review was limited to a brief overview. There is a need for additional research on this topic.

Vocational Awareness

As children develop vocational awareness, Gottfredson (1981) noted that an important life theme emerged. This was defined as the “good provider.” It was defined for men as the good economic provider and for women it usually meant a good homemaker. Women were less often required to have paying jobs because of their husbands work. Many higher-level jobs interfered with the homemaker role (time invested in work meant less time with family) and women seldom chose a lower level position due to perceived low pay and unappealing environment.

This vocational awareness led boys toward money and prestige and girls to working in the home and helping others. As girls moved into those roles and often after a lifetime of socialization, it can be more difficult to break loose.

There have been other theories and articles on career patterns for women. As more women take on dual careers, that is giving equal emphasis on home and paid work, many additional opportunities for career counseling can occur. The stage theories that had developed over the years suggest that a woman's life cycle does not follow a rigid progression but instead follows her unique experiences and needs.

One theory that emerged was the formation of self-identity as the main difference in development between men and women. Women's self-identity may be delayed because of conflicting expectations and messages that they receive. Men learn their masculinity early and are better prepared to adapt to change. But women's boundaries are not as clearly defined especially those centered on gender-linked roles. This factor might be part of the reason for women making life changes or career pattern breaks later in life. They have had more time to develop a gender-role self-identity.

Also discussed was the strong need for women to express themselves in a career that developed after the age of 30. They struggle for the opportunity for greater freedom and personal satisfaction. Midlife transitions are often a time that a woman might reappraise her life and seek satisfaction by developing a separate identity from the one connected to spouse and family (Zunker, 1999).

The general developmental patterns of women suggest that they do not follow the same life stages as men. Due to gender role stereotyping, self-identity is slower to

develop. Career choice is more difficult for women due to some role confusion, lack of role models, and support systems.

Summary

Career theory is not a new topic, but one with an interesting past. The theories have been developed through working with men in the early days of the study of careers, modified to add women, and then modified even more for men and women in transition. Making a career decision is not a single event that takes place only in one's early adulthood, but might happen on other occasions during the life span. As the theory changes different considerations are evident in the research. Super spent almost 50 years in educational research developing and modifying information about careers. Gottfredson followed his work with modifications that indicated that vocational selection starts at an earlier age that Super indicated.

There is a great deal of interest in career transitions and the life change involved in breaking a career pattern. Factors such as changing economies, role expectations, more women in higher education and in the workplace, have caused theories to be modified and changed.

The participants in my original study were a small and convenient sample of women who were seeking to enter the workplace due to some kind of life transition, and so I cannot generalize the findings beyond them. However, there are two implications that might be noteworthy. The first issue seems connected to the socialization of girls and women and the correlation to their career choice and the second issue is concerned with the apparent need for flexible programming for women such as those in my study.

Each woman came into the program because of the need to find employment. They were exposed to training in career theory in order to facilitate their final decision. Several of the study participants mentioned that without the training they would have only looked for a “job” not a decision that could have long-term benefits to them and their families. This study was a close look at all the components that went into the final decision each woman made.

In Donald Super’s (1957b) early work, he described a career pattern as a way to track employment history for working people. It was first designed to examine the life work of white males. As they later applied the theory to working women the theory did not seem to account for divorce and broken homes or for the economically less well to do. By examining the women using their career patterns and their employment background, I was able to understand more about their lives and previous work experience before they transitioned into the workplace as older women. The women from my original study did not find a paid occupation of choice at an early age based on vocationally mature decisions. They initially focused on being “stay-at-home-mothers” and moved in and out of the workplace at various times when the need arose. They worked to provide additional income, to get out of a hostile home environment, or to seek other social needs. They did not have job satisfaction in mind when they found work. Their vocational maturity developed as they had the opportunity to study their skills and interests and build their vocational self-concept. Some of the women in my study were able to define what a career was to them and made plans to move forward. The other women did not.

Super's career patterns did not seem to address women that enter the workforce in a purposeful way later in life. The career patterns also did not provide a true picture for the women who were forced into the workplace when their status changed from homemaker to worker because of economic necessity. Many of the women in my earlier study took some type of temporary employment at various times during the period they were conventional homemakers. Most selected positions for convenience such as day care providers, selling products from their homes, or house cleaning. These occupations did not appear to prepare them for future employment nor did they indicate the other types of occupations that they might pursue. The career pattern does not seem to account for ability to change.

After reading Gottfredson's theory about early socialization and the tendency for women to choose gender acceptable occupations, it seemed evident for the women in this study. They all chose traditional women's occupations. Career patterns became an interesting focus of my final results. The career choice or employment history represented a pattern of employment, which in their case was primarily non-paid work at home. When they chose to work, their occupational choices consisted mostly of low paying and low risk occupations. Their expectation was any work done outside of the home performed a function at that time and would be temporary. At the end of the training period and as the chance to make life changes occurred, it appeared that their pattern had shifted. They were more aware of opportunities that could directly affect their personal lifestyle and financial well-being. However, the most frequent choice was to seek stereotypical women's work.

In summary, career patterns and employment backgrounds are an indicator of prior work experience, expectations, status, and self-concept. If a woman in a conventional homemaking occupation is moving into the workplace, this pattern and the socialization value she placed on that occupation might be helpful in showing her what was in the past so her future can be thought out in different terms. Women need to be exposed to more opportunities so their decisions are a better fit to their skills and interests. Those good decisions can lead to more choices.

Flexible Programming

The second issue was the apparent need for flexible programming. Only four out of eight participants in my study were able to achieve vocational maturity and to make what appeared to be sound career decisions. The others may have benefited from additional structured time in order to continue their work. The value of the group activity and support seemed to provide the evidence that group support was beneficial. Making program completion “competency-based,” that is responding to the needs of students could be one way to be responsive. Networking skills may serve as another way of extending the learning opportunities. Time is also an issue for understanding compromise. When a person understands compromise and takes the time to look at additional options, the decisions might be more clearly thought out.

As noted in the occupations that the women were looking at, most were interested in stereotypical women’s jobs: helping people and office work. They all had an idea of their abilities and all expressed that they knew they were capable women and could achieve their goals. I believe that they just did not set their goals high enough. One of the noticeable problems that I observed was that the participants did not evaluate and seek

out more occupational opportunities. They still looked to stereotypical woman's jobs and did not indicate to me that any other options might be of interest. They either did not have the exposure to more non-traditional opportunities for women or were not sufficiently interested to look into them further. This lack of information for all the participants could provide fewer choices and fewer opportunities for satisfying work.

Their choices were made based on what they understood of the opportunities for them. There could have been other occupations that were of interest, but they did not seem to have looked for more. In research mentioned by Gottfredson (1981) sometimes when a choice is found the research stops. Additional research is not continued. She also mentioned that women tend to look in their particular social space for an occupation as well. Additional time for several of the women in this study could have been beneficial, as their decisions may not have been based on sufficient information.

The intervention for these women took place over a fixed time period of five weeks. I noticed by the variations of vocational maturity time ran out for several of the women in the study. In isolation, teaching toward vocational maturity will only work if the person is ready for the information. Career planning and vocational maturity need to consider the whole woman and all of her needs. That is difficult when the flexibility of time is not available.

For the Future

There is still a need for more research on women's career decisions. Several options of study based on this research could be examined. Providing the opportunity for women to pursue non-traditional occupations should be a high priority. When so few

opportunities are presented the choices become too narrow. As the research in decision-making indicated, part of the process is to examine as many options as are possible.

Further examination of career patterns in women's past employment history as well as the development of their early self-concept could be a topic of future study. Discussion of the history of women's career choices, decisions, and opportunities might help to promote an awareness of additional choices.

Again as noted in the summary was the factor of the fixed time frame. As I examined the data collected from these women's lives, I could see the variations of completion from the structure of the skills center program. As some of the women got involved with the chance to explore their vocational self-concept time ran out. Several were able to choose a stereotypical women's occupation and pursue employment in that area. Additional time may have made a difference in their choices.

There are many factors involved in successful career decision-making that could continue to enhance the understanding of the female adult entering the workplace. Guilt seems to appear very subtly in the study with the women leaving the home environment and still caring for their family. How women can balance the value society places on family against the message women get in the workplace, especially in less than satisfactory choices, plays a role in removing oppression for women. Oppression to the women in this study was leaving a position in the home and moving into the workplace with little experience or few skills. This transition from home to work was caused by a variety of factors but mostly income. These women were moving into the job market with limited skills and could expect to find occupations with lower pay. The report from the WISER group (2001) (Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement) indicated that half of

all women work in traditionally female, relatively low paid jobs without pensions, and that nine out of ten working women earn less than \$45,000 per year. (Wiser, 2001) These are the facts that education and training are seeking to change.

Women's career decisions are an important part of their lives. Finding occupations that match their interests and skills can lead to satisfying careers and lives and compromise plays an interesting role in those decisions. There are many opportunities for colleges to help women make new choices.

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