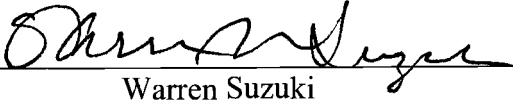# AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Cathie Gerlicher for the degree of Doctor of Education presented on June 6, 2002.
Title: An Exploration with Older Women About Their Career Decision-Making.

Abstract approved: _____

Warren Suzuki

When older women return to the workplace after an absence they can find

the decision-making process difficult. Either their skills are not current or their

knowledge of the workplace is out of date. As a community college administrator,

my interest was in understanding the process older women went through in finding

employment opportunities and making their career decisions.

The women in this study had participated in a structured program that was

offered by a community college. They attempted to identify occupations

appropriate for them with the assistance of a computer program.

I met with seven women who had finished the program at least six months

before our interview. They ranged in age from 36 to 57. One participant had

previously earned a bachelor's degree, and all had some general work experience.

Most of the women had performed temporary work for relatively short periods of

time, but one woman had worked steadily since her graduation from high school.

The participants seemed to make decisions using the tools learned from the

class. Several of the women in this study were still struggling with their career

decisions months after the end of the structured program. They also tended to

choose stereotypical "women's work" as their occupations. The program they attended was structured for a five-week period. A more flexible schedule may have allowed six of the seven participants to benefit from more extended engagement in their career decision making and planning.

The second issue that emerged was that their career patterns did not appear to be congruent with those proposed by Donald Super. Previously proposed patterns 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.

In order to provide equal occupational opportunities for women we need a better understanding of older women who are forced back into the work place for economic or social reasons.

An Exploration with Older Women About Their Career Decision-Making

by
Cathie Gerlicher

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
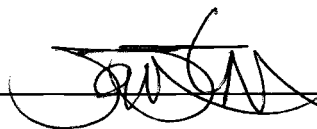the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

Presented June 6, 2002
Commencement June 2003

Doctor of Education thesis of Cathie Gerlicher presented on June 6, 2002.

APPROVED:

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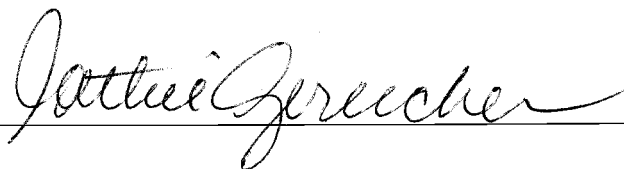Major Professor, representing Education

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Director of the School of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Cathie Gerlicher, Author

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with every large undertaking, the final product is the result of a great deal of effort by a number of people. It was not done alone. Even though the dissertation process is a lonely one, many people were part of the total effort.

I would like to thank my committee for the role they played in this undertaking. To Dr. Ann Smart and Dr. Sally Bowman thanks for volunteering your time to be members of my committee. Dr. Sam Stern, representing the College of Education, thank you for your input and encouragement. And to Dr. Ilene Kleinsorge, representative from the Graduate School, thanks for jumping in at the last minute. Your flexibility helped me finally finish.

A special thanks to my two sons, Ben and Andy; your continued support and encouragement was what kept me going when the times got tough. You guys are great.

And I cannot forget the support of all my good friends. Thanks to all of you I was able to keep my sprits up when I got discouraged and your excitement as I got close to the finish line fired me up also. Thanks to the Slime Molds for their encouragement too. I have been so fortunate to have all these wonderful people taking this journey with me.

And last and most important was the support that came from Dr. Warren Suzuki my Major Professor. The project took a long time, with several big bumps. I cannot thank you enough, Warren, for hanging in with me all the way to the end.

Your suggestions were insightful and meaningful and I'm grateful for all the time you gave me. And mostly I appreciate how patient you were through the entire process. Many thanks.

So, one journey is over and now I'm ready to move onto the next. The confidence and experience I gained from the completion of this dissertation will be my first step.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

A metaphor for career change in later life might be the kaleidoscope. When the pieces of colored glass in the tube are rearranged, 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. The women in this study entered a five-week program, sponsored by a community college, to re-examine their skills, learn new skills, look at possible occupations, and make decisions about new employment. The program was 60 hours of guided instruction directed toward the unemployed or underemployed seeking new opportunities in the workplace. They all had the opportunity to change their lives by examining their skills, interests, and values from a more informed 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 compare those topics to the stories my participants shared. There is a great deal of literature on career theory. Its history goes back to the early 1900s when the interest was in primarily men and their

career choices. Women's career decisions entered the theories as a more serious topic in the 1950s, and since that time several theories have been developed about careers and ways to help both men and women make good choices. Three of the earlier theorists were Super (1957a), Holland (1973), and Roe (1957). Other researchers followed, and their theories were based on the work of these early leaders.

The purpose of this study was to understand the process by selected women as they made decisions affecting their potential career change. Using an applied educational research method, the approach used in this study was to examine their experiences from a career planning class and draw out of that experience their decision-making processes.

By using an applied qualitative research approach, the results allowed me to change some of the methods I used on my job. I gained more understanding of a small sample of adult women students and their struggle to make career changes. I am unable to make general assumptions about a larger population based on the findings from this study. The sample was small and representative only of a select group of women who willingly chose to attend a particular career planning program.

The first three chapters of this study provided the framework to help interpret the stories told by the seven women interviewed. Chapter Two was a review of the literature on career development, decision-making, and career compromise. This chapter also reviewed some of the findings related to self-

concept and vocational awareness. Some literature about women in transition was provided to help understand how women made changes in their lives.

Chapter Three outlined the methods used to conduct the interviews, analyze the data, and organize the findings. This chapter also described the program the women attended and the objectives of that program in relationship to their career decisions. This chapter reviewed the qualitative research methodology that relates to my worldview.

Chapter Four introduced the women in the study and told their stories. It will provide rich descriptions of their progression and their movement toward making changes in their lives. Some of the women were successful in their change and others had less success. The final chapters will include some observations about the findings and other areas of study worth pursuing.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this research was to understand the ways older women re-entering the work force, or who made mid-career changes, made their career decision. I had been involved in teaching career planning to students at the community college level for several years. The career planning instruction helped students discover their skills and interests and then helped them find occupations that matched. The goal of this instruction was for students to have better tools from which to choose meaningful occupations.

This topic also had special meaning for me because of a personal transition. For over fifteen years I was co-owner of a small business. My former spouse and I created a software firm that at the time of our divorce had 50 employees with annual sales of over five million dollars. I was active in all aspects of the business from computer programming and customer support, to back office accounting. My separation from the business caused a major life transition and led to career decisions that made a large impact on my life. 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 what choices women made when they changed from homemaking occupations into paid occupations. As this issue was examined, I reviewed many articles relating to the methods women used in their career development. The range of studies was quite broad and many articles overlapped with similar information. A broad overview of these studies has been provided.

When faced with career decisions, people often look to their families and their current socioeconomic 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). Past research indicated that women tended to look toward their mothers as role models for work, and a mother's employment history and status may influence her daughter's perception of the female gender role, as it may shape occupational behavior. Daughters who identified with their fathers seemed to choose more "masculine" occupations, and girls identifying with their mothers tended 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 non-traditional careers was found to be more common if

their mothers had advanced degrees or non-traditional careers. It was also found

that the influence of the household promoted decision-making to follow the

occupational choice based on parental interests. Women can find themselves in

role-conflicts because of traditional male and female occupational stereotypes, and

these stereotypes can make choices more difficult (Auster & Auster, 1981; Betz,

1982; Gottfredson, 1981; Nevill & Damico, 1978; Peoples, 1975; Vermeulen &

Minor, 1998). Stereotypical female 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 as

well as their own social expectations.

More occupations are stereotyped as "male" than as "female," and many

occupations of higher status or prestige tend 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 workforce 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 women's choices were based on lower levels of ability then were males with comparable abilities. This continued to reflect that decision-making based on social expectations was still the norm.

Gutek and Larwood (1987) indicated that in the earlier years men had careers and women only had temporary employment. In many families, women were expected to take jobs only 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; Thorne, 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 (1983) 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 about 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. There were far more occupations 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. People's 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).

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Women often have different needs, interests, and barriers than men when they seek ways to return to the job market. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Jeynes (1992) found that women returning to the workplace 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 that they were as unskilled as they were when they left high school. Women may lack personal confidence when they have either been out of the job market for a period of time or in a job less suitable to 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 lacked 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 change in current occupations. This also plays a role in women having difficulty with 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.

The literature review was organized to provided a background on career theory and its development over the years. This review helped the researcher understand more about women in the workplace, or transitioning to the workplace, and how to get past the barriers that hold back decisions. The opening paragraphs of this chapter reveal a great deal about women and how important vocational maturity is. To make good career decisions, women need to have confidence in their skills and abilities and understand the job market.

The literature review also incorporates three primary discussion points related to women and their career decision-making processes. The first section reviewed career theory and focused on theory relating to self-concept and vocational concepts.

After career theory, the review examined some decision-making models. There were many different theories and processes for making informed decisions and in this study several articles and resources describing decision-making were mentioned. It was interesting to examine the decision-making strategies the participants in this study used and the choices they made. The literature suggests careful planning and setting clear goals might help people with decisions (Arroba, 1977; Gelatt & Clark, 1967; Herr & Cramer, 1984).

The final topic in the review of the literature was the compromise made based on decision-making. This was the transitional piece, as action takes place based on compromise and the understanding of it. This section reviewed different compromise theories, examined women in transition, and provided an overview of

literature on self-concept. This literature review provided the base of understanding

career choice, as the topic of women and their entry into the workforce has created

several different avenues of research opportunities. The participants in this study

provided some examples of the process of making career decisions in a specific

situation. The study was deliberately focused on a specific classroom experience in

order to attempt to understand the participants.

CAREER THEORY

     As I began this study, I read some of the literature that might have touched

on my participants' experiences, as well as my own, in making career choices.

Items such as goal setting, decision-making, vocational understanding, and

information about the many roles women play in society were included in the

reading. Some of the literature went back to the early days of vocational guidance,

and the changes in historical perspective were informative. I was influenced by the

writings of Donald Super and his self-concept theory. His work was relevant in that

the career transition program used in this study focused on development of self-

concept and how a strong self-concept can influence career decisions. Another

well-known theorist in career development was John Holland (1973). His focus

was based primarily on personality and using personal characteristics as defined by

personality to make choices. However, the career transition program in this study

used very little of Holland's material. I also found the literature by Linda

Gottfredson (1981) and her study on girls and their early influences toward gender specific occupations and decision-making an interesting addition to the review.

Donald Super's (1957a, 1957b) writings of career decision-making was the beginning of my understanding of theory. The theory stated that a person's understanding about themselves is core to their career decision-making strategy. This theory examined the basic components of a person, that is, to review their skills and interests, and then provide counseling for occupational decision-making by matching interests to occupations. This theory defined one of several ways people make career decisions (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The theory was described as a person's attempt to implement a vocational interest that represented their projection of vocational self-concept in terms of stereotypes held about occupations. A person may select or reject an occupation because of the belief that the field is not consistent with their self-view. This theory is used in counseling settings to examine physical and psychological factors in combination with environmental variables that affect the workplace. Each stage of a person's development creates different opportunities for career planning intervention. Older adults may need a deeper intervention and more time than a younger person. Time may need to be spent updating a person's vocational behavior by addressing new skills, interests, and values to develop techniques to deal with vocational tasks. Those tasks could include short-term training, college courses, or on-the-job training specific to an industry.

Super's primary research took place from the 1940s into the 1990s, and it has been studied and used by practitioners for many years. Super's vocational self-concept theory on planning for your career and making career decisions is still being used in career-planning resources, e.g. The Career Fitness Program (Sukiennik, Bendat, & Raufman, 1998). This theory is based on helping people learn more about themselves in order to make career decisions. The women in this study were from the generation of Super's theories, during the emergence of women as a force in the workplace.

"Career guidance" is both an old and a new term, since the practice of vocational guidance started nearly a century ago. Earlier it focused on young men and was based on the premise that men would enter an occupation and spend their working lives in that same occupation. Career guidance is also a new term, as we look at men and women more equally and help them through career decisions at different points in their lives. There is no longer an assumption that an individual will start in an occupation and remain in that occupation for the duration of his or her work life.

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 et al., 2000). In 1957, Super 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 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 may make more informed decisions.

Lucas et al. (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. Those "messages" came from parents, teachers, religious connections, and the media to "teach" girls to emphasize home and family pursuits. The conflict of the messages from home and either spouses or boyfriends can create barriers to decision-making.

Super (1953) defined a career as a "course of events that constitutes a life." A career is more than just an occupation; it is a series of positions that a person holds during her working life. These positions can be paid or non-paid. Super (1983) updated his definition to include all "work-related roles such as those of student, employee, and pensioner or annuitant" (p. 7). Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) affirm this definition by stating that "a career is the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (p. 51). Other writers, including feminist researchers, indicate that a career definition that only defines work experience is too limiting for women. A woman's career should include all the portions of her life, not just her gainful employment (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). In Super's later

writings (1984), he developed a Life-Career Rainbow that graphically described the different roles a person has during their lifespan. This cycle of life roles makes up a person's "life-cycle" and the total structure of the rainbow was referred to as a career pattern. It encompassed a lifespan for each person.

During the last few years of his life, Super was still adjusting his theory on career patterns and life stages. As the economy changed, as personal concepts of self and their roles in society changed, further considerations could be made about career theory.

In an article by Dorothy Nevill (1995), she discussed a common theme in Super's past that reflected how the theories have changed with time and that he was constantly writing and developing broader ideas as the world of work changed. She also made several suggestions that could continue to enhance theory for career development based on Super's years of writing. Some of those included the impact of economic change, the reduction of barriers and the change in women's role in the workforce, and the change in role conflict. It is still argued by some that women were not able to pass through the same developmental stages as men and that Super's life stages were not applicable to women, especially as their roles have changed over the past several decades (Kerka, 1992). There is a great deal to learn about developmental stages of women.

As people develop a more defined vocational self-concept over time and develop perceptions of occupations, they compare those occupational images with their own vocational self-image in order to make career decisions. The more

similarly women view themselves and occupations, the better the match (Eck, 1993; Ornstein & Isabella, 1990; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). The curriculum the skills center program used in this study was based on the vocational self-concept theory. Their goal was to provide information which could be used to make good choices.

Another aspect of the career decision is the concept of choice. According to Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) vocational choice has three components. First is the occupational preference, or what a person might like the best or the least. Next is the aspiration or the ideal or fantasy choice, where a person might think about the perfect occupation she could do if she could do anything. Finally, there is the intention. This is the occupation a person actually intends to enter once their education or training is complete. Ideally all three choices will be congruent in the final decision.

There are major gaps in knowledge about women in career theory that call for letting go of the idea of one large theory that will focus on the entire workforce. Instead, researchers and practitioners should increase the number of smaller, more specific theories that deal with obstacles, variables, and barriers that get in the way of career behavior of women. New theories can compare to the old and incorporate where relevant. Practitioners can provide the ethnographic analysis important to expand perspectives on career experiences of women (Herr, 1996).

Herr (1996) also focused on the assumption that career theory and practice are not integrated. This integration could be helpful in the counseling of women in career transition as practitioners develop and understand more theory.

Savickas and Walsh (1996) introduce their book with a discussion about the change in career theory and practice after a decade of occupational changes. Their premise was that counseling had evolved into two sciences: one of theory and another of practice. Practitioners are more in need of knowledge to help clients make successful transitions to the workplace than in theory and research. Some women, minorities, and others not in the mainstream of work do not fit into the basic career theory research.

Also evident in the book edited by Savickas and Walsh (1996) was that the first section contained six chapters referring specifically to the importance of integrating theory into practice and the need for practitioners to be more active in research. Each chapter also mentioned the difficulty of applying current theory to women. There is a great need to study women, minorities, and others that are outside of what might be considered mainstream employment. In a fairly current study (Kerka, 1998), it was noted that some of the current career theories were based solely on research on white middle-class males from middle-class backgrounds, so the applicability to women and other non-white male groups could be questionable. Herr (2000) also agreed that a single career development theory adequate to explain career behavior across the lifespan for both men and women would be unlikely. Practitioners can play an important role in developing new

theories that will be practical for counselors in the field, or to work more on practical methods that practitioners can use based on current theory.

Career patterns

In the 1950s, Super described a career pattern for men that focused mostly on the idea of a single career choice. This choice was made early in adulthood and was maintained throughout the working life. As economies changed, men, and later women, moved away from a single occupation into additional and perhaps different occupational choices. This movement invoked even more interest in how career decisions were made, since they may happen repeatedly (Diamond, 1987). Super also described that a career pattern might indicate a strong self-concept that could have been derived from work and life satisfaction. A career pattern provided some basic assumptions concerning social, educational, and occupational mobility of both men and women and could enable counselors to foresee problems they were likely to encounter if the pattern changed (Zunker, 1990).

The theory of people having only a single career pattern in their entire working life was originated in the field of sociology. It referred to the sequence of occupations in the life of an individual. The sequence was analyzed to learn how the major work periods constituted a career. This information was helpful in studying where people were in the life stages as related to employment satisfaction (Super, 1957a).

The psychological life stages as developed by Super through analyzing career development throughout the lifespan were summarized into five stages. The Growth Stage starts from age 0 to 14, followed by the Exploration Stage (15-25). Next was the Establishment Stage (25-45), then the Maintenance Stage (45-65). The Decline Stage ran until the end of life. The ages were estimates, as people may never leave a stage, such as Exploration, or they may return to a stage and recycle through it more than one time. These life stages were developed primarily to examine men's working lives. The concept was later expanded, since people do not necessarily follow these stages in this exact order (Super, 1984). As the economy changes and the nature of occupations changes, people may need to return to an earlier stage. People continue to explore career options as they attempt to find their "place in life" (Super, 1957a). It appeared that individuals could do the exploration stage at any time in the lifespan, including women who were entering or re-entering the workforce at an older age.

This work became the classification system for career patterns. They were first established for men (Super, 1957a).

1. Stable career pattern. Professional, mostly skilled workers who moved directly from school or college into a type of work consistently followed.
2. Conventional. A sequence of jobs that may lead to stable employment.
3. Unstable. Worker does not succeed in establishing himself permanently in a lifetime job or occupation, but may move from position to position. These are mostly unskilled workers.
4. Multiple trial. Frequent change in employment with no dominant type to establish a career. Generally disconnected workers. (p.74)

Super also studied vocational interests and how they flow into career choice. In his early work, he suggested that vocational choice was a natural part of life development (Super et al., 1957). He also suggested that people follow a single pattern during the lifespan, and choosing the right occupation leads to job satisfaction. In addition, Super et al. (1957) described vocational development to suggest, "work satisfactions and life satisfactions depend upon the extent to which the individual finds adequate outlets for his abilities, interests, personality traits, and values" (p. 95). The basic premise of the theory remains viable today: understanding and recognizing skills, interests, and abilities, and then matching them to occupations can lead to good career decisions and work satisfaction. Super (1957b) and Osipow (1983) suggested that satisfaction is sought in work and that vocational guidance can help people find that "right" work. There are a lot of factors involved in career decision-making, and education and training can help people make their choices. By making "good" choices, a person's self-concept is usually better fulfilled, and their lives are richer.

There are often differences between a woman's career choice and the position she finally takes (Diamond, 1987). The first part of career choice is generally based on personality, interests, and abilities; the second part, what job she may choose, can depend on influences such as demographic factors, economic conditions, or family attitudes. There are many factors that influence the ability to make choices.

Ornstein and Isabella (1990) and Sullivan (1992) suggest that Super's career stages do not apply to women, and those studies indicated that career development for women might be different. Some attitudes, such as staying in a position for a long period of time or the desire for promotion, might not be as relevant to women as men. Women tend to have more career interruptions than men, and this could influence their views on employment as a single, continuous position or an occupation. Women's career development could be more complex than men's. Men have been socialized to work throughout their lifetime and form their sense of identity through their work. Women, on the other hand, traditionally have wide social contacts and may rely less on the workplace for this identity. Sullivan (1992) suggested that women have less traditional views of marriage and work than men do. Women realized that they could successfully balance career and family demands. Men tended to have a more traditional view and made decisions based on their viewpoint even when women may not necessarily share it.

When Super wrote about career patterns in women he broadened them into seven career patterns, as follows (1975b):

1. Stable homemaking. Women marry shortly after they finish their education and have no significant work experience afterwards.
2. Conventional. Women enter work after high school or college, but after marriage they cease work to enter full-time home-making.
3. Stable working. After high school or college, women work continuously throughout the lifespan.
4. Double-track. This pattern characterizes those women who combine career and homemaking roles throughout their lifespan.

5. Interrupted. Women enter into work, then marriage and full-time homemaking, and later return to a career, often after children can care for themselves.
6. Unstable. Women drop out of the work force, return to it, drop out, and return – repeating the cycle over again.
7. Multiple trial. A woman works, but never really establishes a career. She may have a number of different unrelated jobs during her lifetime (p. 76).

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) described a career pattern as a career behavior that may be regular and predictable after studying the individual. These patterns were intended to depict a place in the workforce that indicated how people progressed. Super (1957b) indicated that it was a lifetime pattern that starts at an early age. In the research done at a later time by Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996), they noted that these patterns were the result of "many psychological, physical, situational, and societal factors that, when accumulated, make up an individual's life" (p. 112). They also mentioned that in order to understand a person's vocational life, the whole cycle must be observed and then future occupational choices might be predictable. The research did not take into consideration events that might occur to cause an apparent pattern to change. Events such as accidents, injuries or even illnesses that might cause work changes were left out of the discussion of career patterns.

Super (1957b) thought that values changed with age and a value assumed for a younger woman might not be the same as a value in an older woman. In a 1999 interview in Newsweek, a grandmother talked about her first and only job. She supported five children as a single parent and recently retired after 39 years.

Her income at retirement was $18,000 per year. When asked what she found

fulfilling about her low paying job, her reply was, "I knew when payday came I had

money to feed my children" (Kennedy, 1999, p. 19). People are very different when

it comes to work and the value they place on it.

Betz (1982) also researched career choices for women. By applying

"Maslow's hierarchy of needs," she examined how women's needs were met. Some

women, who had chosen homemaking for careers, had their basic needs satisfied by

their spouse's work. When these women looked for gainful employment, they did

not always perceive that they could fulfill their own needs and not be reliant on

their husbands' work. This can either open new options for women or it can

continue the path of women staying in traditional women's occupations.

According to Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) some of the predictions made

by the earlier theories failed to materialize. It was thought that a career might be

static and failed to realize the impact of social and/or cultural forces in career

development as men and women made occupational changes. As far back as 1965

it was predicted that the single occupation career would end and the "serial" career

would increase as people make new career decisions. During that same time the

stigma of class barriers had changed, and some of the earlier expectations had

begun to disappear. As families played a role in the influence of their children's

careers, they were learning more about occupations and some of the social stigmas

were changing. This change helped to provide more and different choices for both

men and women. Men and women still have employment and family differences that affect how their career decisions are made.

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) stated that it might be unreasonable to develop a sound theory of vocational development without including the new cultural and economic changes. It was also noted according to Diamond (1987) that until true gender equality of career opportunity exists, different theories of career development for men and women were needed.

Larwood and Gutek (1987) discussed examining women's needs as different from men. They wrote about the expectations of men to rise in their careers and stay employed. Men were expected to move up the ladder toward successful careers but women, on the other hand, were assumed to leave their careers for their families, and in some situations encouraged to do so. This led to continued discrimination against women in both pay opportunities as well as advancement. In developing a theory for women and their career decisions, elements such as career preparation from an early age, more occupational awareness, and a better understanding of the difficulties of balancing family need to be included.

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) stated that research in career theory is not complete. Women tend to have special needs and barriers that are not included in the other theories. Career theory has changed over time, to not only study women in the workplace, but also the movement of people entering the workplace and dropping out or changing occupations multiple times. Economic environments and

increasing use of technology are also factors in career changes. These more complex decisions are all factors in career counseling and educational services.

Stage theory

In the study of self-concept, Super's writings over the years often referred to developmental issues from childhood. He was influenced by lifespan development and wrote 61 publications during his life that related to self-concept and vocational maturity as people age. Stage theory is one model of lifespan development. The topics stage theorists have concentrated on include events that occur during the lifespan, psychological progression, and sociological changes people make (Zunker, 1990). According to Osipow (1983) part of the process for career planning is to identify a person's life stage (stage theory) and their level of career maturity. Career maturity should follow lifespan development in that people behave in certain ways during periods of time. As one matures, ideally, their self-concept becomes more stable and they have a better understanding of their skills, abilities, and interests.

Erikson (1968) was considered a stage theorist, and his psychosocial developmental stages started at birth and continued through old age. These developmental tasks were ones that children and adults passed through during the lifespan and represented the tasks that should be accomplished during each stage.

Super's (1990) concept of career-development tasks followed fairly close to Havighurst (1953) and expected people to accomplish certain physical or career

related activities by certain ages. Students who do not achieve the tasks may require special attention and direction. In Erikson's (1968) stages of development, students learn productivity. The reward for productivity plays a role in work-role and self-concept development. This closely relates to Super's self-concept theory for vocational development. When faced with career choices, women have additional barriers that influence their choices. Stage theory does not separate men and women during this process.

Self-concept is an ongoing process and changes as people develop. The interaction between personal growth and development (Havighurst, 1953), cognitive development (Piaget, as cited by Erikson, 1968), and social development (Erikson, 1968) all play a role in the self-concept theory. All of the different stages play a role in human development and a breakdown in any developmental stage may cause a delay in vocational maturity.

Stage theory was primarily based on the young, white male experience and that experience was generalized and became the method to compare women and minorities (Kerka, 1992). Kerka (1992) observed that women's lives are less linear, and although developmental tasks men and women learn might be the same, they don't necessarily develop at the same time. It is this difference that should be recognized and studied. A very appropriate analogy from Marshall (2000) was that of developing a bridge for career transition. The anchor on one side is the person's worldview and the other what they see to be achievable and desirable. Our job is to

help them build their bridge from one side to the other and cross with them when they are ready.

Adult developmental models describe changes that may occur in the lifespan that might require intervention. Erikson's (1968) stages have been refined for adult behavior and several others have also been developed. They offer resolution for adult crisis. The role of self-esteem is of interest, as it relates to career counseling. Intervention during crisis and continuing the work on vocational self-concept is an important part of career work. As with developmental stages for children, several developmental stages for adults have been studied. They all offer intervention for adult transition. The focus of adult intervention is directed to job loss, mid-life crisis, and dissatisfaction to current work (Zunker, 1990). No reference was made to women who might enter paid work as older adults except in a general way to pursue leisure or retirement activities (Super, 1984).

In a study done by Neufeldt, Austin, Brooks, and Kimbrough (1985), adult career stage theory was studied to understand the relationship of life development and career stages. Using career developmental stages, the study starts at stage one where the person is starting their first job. The focus of the study was to examine people at work and observe if adult developmental stages are reflected in their careers. The study found no consistent patterns of development throughout adulthood and the conclusion was that the study did not support the existence of adult career stages. For career planning and mid-life transitions, finding a pattern of expected behavior might be difficult.

Career patterns and stage theory both relate to personal development and then lead to career decisions. Even though career patterns and possibly stage theory patterns do not fit well for women, they are of interest for further study. The early decisions that women make after high school set a pattern of employment that can be difficult to change. When they choose maintaining the household and raising children rather than paid employment, their future employment options could be limited. It takes more time for these women to learn about their options. The analogy of the bridge is especially relevant, as it is part of the job to help them cross the bridge when they are ready, not when the program or training ends.

Over the years, human development projects have studied children and have used boys as the model and then compared girls to that standard (Merriam, 1998). In adult studies, white men have been the standard set for both genders in educational studies, medical research, and other categories. Society felt that women were different from men but when compared against men, women were perceived as, and felt, inferior (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Women could not seem to measure up to the men's standards. This tendency has been slow to change, but there has been more research by women for women done in recent times. Women develop into their careers differently than men and that difference is worthy of study.

DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES AND METHODS

Strategies

Super (1957b) described a the "accident theory" of decision-making in career development and that happens by chance. 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, was defined as external events that took place in a person's life. Those events played a role in a career decision that might not be a factor for someone else. One example might be overcoming a serious drug addiction through 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 in a career context (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, 1984; Astin, 1998; Auster & Auster, 1981; Betz, 1982; Burghardt & Gordon, 1990; Drentea, 1998; Gerlicher, 1998; Greenhaus & Simon, 1977; Gutek & Larwood, 1987; 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 might not be accepted by the family, that choice might not be selected.

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 overpowered 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 duel role of outside work as well as homemaking.

There are other theories used in career decision-making. The typology theory proposed by John Holland (1973) suggested there is a process whereby personal attributes are matched with occupational attributes to select the occupation that fits best. Holland's theory was based on the assumption that vocational interests were one aspect of personality and a description of a person's vocational interests also described the individual's personality (Zunker, 1990). Holland (1973) also indicated that people were characterized by their resemblance to one of six occupational clusters. Each preference is learned through a variety of cultural and personal factors. That influence directs people into their socially/culturally acceptable preference and into congruent occupations.

Preferred school subjects, recreational activities, hobbies, or work often relate to personality traits. The choice or preference is an expression of one's personality. This theory served as the basis for many career-planning activities such as Holland's (1973) personality based "Self Directed Search," computer career search programs, and career games and activities searching for congruency between a person and a situation or occupation. Although his theory is helpful in career planning, his ideas are not sufficiently useful when trying to understand the career development of women. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) discussed the limitations in Holland's theory and thought that additional research is needed. Holland's work activities tended to cluster gender specific occupations together. One example was the realistic cluster. It emphasizes careers that appeal more to men. Even the names of the clusters tend to be tied together by gender. Women tend to cluster in the Social and Conventional groups and men in the Realistic and Investigative. The final two, Artistic and Enterprising, are more gender neutral. The physical characteristics for each cluster were described in gender specific terms as well. A realistic type is said to be masculine, materialistic, frank, and uninsightful. The social type is said to be cooperative, feminine, friendly, insightful, tactful, and understanding (Holland, 1973).

Roe (1957) described a different method of career decision-making. She developed a personality based classification system of interest clusters such as outdoor physical interests, business interests, and others. She then developed levels of interest in these fields, such as high level of interest (management) to lower

levels (non-managerial and lower skilled). Roe theorized that people choose by the cluster of interest, then by the commitment level or motivation toward their choice. This examination of different theories supports that people make their decisions based on a variety of reasons, choices, circumstances, family pressures, and cultural pressures.

Roe's classification system was used to understand occupational roles in the life of an individual. Occupations were clustered in six levels from high professional levels to lower unskilled ones that have similar characteristics with a variety of categories. One example was the outdoor field. It may start at the athletic coach; move down to athlete, bricklayer, janitor, and finally deckhand. The occupational descriptions have changed over time as jobs have changed, but it still serves as a method for career counselors. This method provides another tool to help students understand options that might be available to them based on their abilities (Osipow, 1983).

Hilton (1962) identified four separate models of career decision-making. The first was choosing a career that satisfied a person's immediate needs by examining only financial outcomes for decision-making. The second was a decision-making model based on one's personal social structure and how one might fit into that structure. The third, the complex information model, required that a person make a career decision that matched satisfactory behavioral outcomes to career outcomes. This could include a very narrow search for quick decision-making. The fourth model eliminates disagreeable elements until all that is left is

acceptable. The choice of a model depends on many factors. These can include the counseling techniques, training and beliefs of instructors or counselors that offer career guidance instruction, and family and community influences.

Hilton's fourth method may be the most difficult to envision. In summary, for adults seeking to find occupations that match their current interests and skills, trying to eliminate elements may leave the student with too few choices. When examining the process of making a decision that is resolving a conflict, then all the elements should be available for people to choose from.

In a study by Gati and Fassa (1995) the elimination theory was expanded into another type of decision-making process. The research was developed into multiple steps to eliminate as many options as possible before the decision-making was started. This elimination method was based on choosing a cluster of alternatives, talking about the cognitive and material limitations that might be related to the alternatives, and then ranking the alternatives that remain. From the remaining choices the elimination continued until all factors had been considered. This was done by gathering more information, then ranking the choice in order of desirability, and finally outlining the steps to implement the first choice. This process could be a done in a counseling session, but is more difficult to work out with a group.

A decision-making process proposed by Kaldor and Zytowski (1969) described making occupational choices from an economic decision-making perspective. They described the process as: first considering one's preference, then

looking at the resources available to the individual, and finally choosing based on the potential for gratification, or finding the highest "net value." This model would help people decide on occupations offering the most money within the individual's resources. One example could be someone interested in medicine choosing to go into law instead because the money would be as good and the time for training would be shorter. This can be an effective decision-making tool when planned carefully.

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. The 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 decision-making follow through to step four to be complete.

Decision-making styles

The literature mentions other methods used to make decisions. Arroba (1977) classified a series of several styles used for decision-making. These particular methods were evident in the data collected from the interviews. 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 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 help students learn to evaluate their decision from different

perspectives and hopefully consider more options.

The literature reviewed helped in understanding 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 may be based on the demographics of the person's community, willingness to move, pressures from family members, and financial resources.

COMPROMISE AND TRANSITION

Gottfredson and Lapan (1997) suggest that children go through a developmental process where they eliminate entire sections of the occupational world they consider incompatible with their self-concept. They learn about their socioeconomic location in society and eliminate occupations they view unacceptable for people like they perceive themselves to be. That elimination process is similar for gender and intelligence. Gottfredson's description of occupational aspirations were based on Super and Erikson's developmental stages. She indicated people become attracted to certain occupations that are compatible with their self-image at certain developmental stages (Zunker, 1990).

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

Next was the elimination of positions that did not fit within their social status, which was the orientation to social valuation (ages 9-13). These were occupations children and their family might consider to be lacking in prestige. And

finally, beginning at age 14, was orientation to the 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, interventions such as career related activities need to start with 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 Gottfredson provided were a talented musician compromising by teaching 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 clearer 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. It is interesting to note that in Super's work he suggested that people would make good career decisions based on interests, yet Gottfredson said that interests would be dropped if there were a compromise to sex type or prestige. A study done by Hesketh and Durant (1990) suggested there was no support for Gottfredson's compromise theory stating that self-concept aspects were the last aspects to be sacrificed. Their study found that sex type aspects were not always the last to be discarded. If the intervention provided enough information, then that gender attribute could be eliminated and an interest could move up in priority.

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 et al. (1990) found that interests have a

higher priority than Gottfredson theorized. 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. Another study by Sullivan and Mahalik (2000) recognized that gender was an important factor influencing 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 on women.

Additional studies of people making decisions showed that compromise was a key component. Pryor and Taylor (1986) and also Taylor and Pryor (1985) 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 people's needs and at the same time allow them to understand that the choices they made were the right ones. People 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 a person does when evaluating career choices. People need the opportunity to "try on" the roles of careers they might be interested in pursuing. Trainers, instructors, and 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:

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 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; 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 in order 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 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 in 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.

Gottfredson's theory

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) this 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 a woman 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 a woman's belief about herself, and self-esteem as 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.

The 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.

Gottfredson 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 a person's self-concept at different times during their early development.

For women, it is in those early years that occupations may be determined as appropriate or not appropriate. This is the gender portion of the self-concept theory, when girls learn their perception of 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 the 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 pays 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 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 that when students leave high school to implement their choices, they become more sensitive to the jobs most readily available. They balance the perceptions that have 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 person's 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 include a feeling of lack of accomplishment. This group of women may have many expectations they are hoping to fill (Zunker, 1990).

Transition can be in the form of mid-life changes, lack of children in the home, financial, or health reasons. According to Brown (1995) planned transitions occur for two basic reasons. First was the lack of satisfaction if one's 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

mid-life women are stuck in moderate paying jobs with little or no chance of moving up (Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, 1993). 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), 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 Super's stage theory as it applied to career development. They suggested that Super's theory was developed when people held a single career and were not making occupational transitions. When job markets and economies changed, people began making more career changes and additional studies about these transitions were needed. This new stage suggested by Bejian and Salomone (1995) was labeled a renewal stage. Renewal could take place at a time during Super's maintenance stage. The change occurs when individuals make mid-career re-evaluations and possible changes. In the Erikson life stage theory, renewal was identified as a

career consolidation during his sixth stage (generativity versus stagnation).

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, have funded training

for women in transition. Their success might relate to the goals of being self-

sufficient. This is attempting to keep women out of the welfare system and 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 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 a good economic provider and for women it usually meant a

good homemaker. Women were less often required to have paying jobs because of their husband's 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 women make 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. Mid-life 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, 1990).

The general developmental patterns of women suggest 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.

Networking and group support

Networking has become an addition to some of the job search strategies we see today (Drentea, 1998). Formal networking could have provided the link some of the women in this study were missing. Women tend to network with other women at the same job level and men use networking to improve their opportunities in the job market.

If women are going to use networking as a strategy, then career training needs to teach how to draw support from more aspects of the community. Expanded networking in the community is another good reason for cooperative work experience, job shadow, or information interviews to teach setting clear goals from the outset of the training experience (Drentea, 1998).

As we teach women to network and expand their career search abilities, we also need to continue to teach women about additional career choices. Moving into non-traditional areas of work or broadening their knowledge about other possibilities still plays an important role in job counseling. Research in the past has shown slow changes in the practices of career counselors, and as we look to the future we need to move beyond the historical methods. People need to be provided with the best information about their choices (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980).

As the research indicated (Drentea, 1998; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980), other people in a work environment of interest to the job searcher may be of assistance. The only value the participants in my study, with one exception, saw in returning to the skills center was for social reasons. None of them thought of the program as a resource for later use.

Group intervention, or support group, was another method women could use to interact. In an article by Mawson and Kahn (1993), a structured setting for career planning was studied. They found that from a guided workshop and several hours of group intervention, the women were able to help each other clarify their career decisions and provide shared personal feelings and feedback. This type of informal setting was helpful for women to discuss their goals.

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 lifespan. 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 suggested vocational selection starts at an earlier age than 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, and more women in higher education and in the workplace, have caused theories to be modified and changed.

Chapter Four will introduce several women who, through a life change, had the opportunity to do work on career decision-making. They had all married young and several were homemakers for most of their early careers. Their stories tell about the difficulty in making changes to their lifestyles and how the intervention of a formal career-planning program affected their choice.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

INTRODUCTION

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) the qualitative researcher is viewed as taking on multiple and gendered images and may be referred to as a "maker of quilts." This quilt maker uses many tools, such as strategies, methods, or materials to make the project come together. They also mention that the choices of methods are determined by the question, and the question depends on the context. The question in this research is directed toward women making career decisions. The methods will include the interviewee's voices as they tell the reader about the process they used to decide their the future.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) refer to methodology as the "general logic and theoretical perspective for research" (p. 31). They describe a connection between the participants and inductive reasoning. Understanding people means getting close to them by listening to them talk. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also describe qualitative research as the "…studied use and collection of a variety of materials" (p. 3), and they included case studies among the materials. They also describe qualitative research as "…an activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3). This was a qualitative study that was influenced by several different perspectives.

Since the purpose of this study was to understand the ways women re-entering the work force made their career decision, in-depth interviews were used as the method to collect data so the women's stories could be heard. Techniques

from a variety of sources were used as guides to developing the framing questions,

staging the interviews, analyzing the data, and writing the results (e.g., Hoepfl,

1997; Kvale, 1996; McCraken, 1988). As Tong (1998) described, many feminist

researchers are moving beyond traditional, male dominated, research perspectives

and methods to examine research in different ways. These different methods

provide more diverse information about women as separate beings from men.

Carolyn Karen (1990) studied interrelationships in returning women students. The

purpose of her methodology was to allow women's "voices" to be heard and to

facilitate an understanding of their stories. Through listening and gathering stories,

the life histories of several women were collected. The sense of empowering them

for their lives became the focus of her study and that focus allowed the women to

appreciate their lives and to build on their personal successes. Understanding

people and recording their messages aids in the opportunity to build successes in

our practices. There are other studies, especially in feminist research, that focused

on hearing women talk about their stories and helping them discover the value of

their lives and the ways they can be successful. Nugent (1993) and Tarule (1988)

studied the processes of women gaining an understanding of who they were. Susan

Nugent (1993) also wrote about building confidence in students by encouraging

them to tell their stories, to learn more about themselves, and to feel more confident

about their ability to learn. The value of research is to help learn new ways to view

our world and how we can make decisions.

RESEARCHER'S DISCLOSURE

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), as a qualitative researcher I should disclose to the readers my worldviews and how I came to these understandings. Readers can then have some sense of why I asked certain questions and how I understood what my participants said. Reinharz (1992) suggested that self-disclosure in research was a good practice in helping to relate to and understand the data. The related literature and my professional and personal experiences provided an overview of what I understood about making career choices when I entered into data collection and analysis. I have also presented my "case" in the next chapter to describe how my own experiences were similar to and yet different than those of my participants.

As both a researcher and a teacher of career planning, the process of career decision-making was of interest. From the teaching viewpoint, I chose to start with theory developed originally by Frank Parsons in the early 1900s. Parson's primary process was to help a person match his traits with those required by available occupations. His theory was broadened and developed by Donald Super from the 1950s to the present. Following Super's theory came the career theory of Linda Gottfredson, whose work was important to my dissertation. This theoretical development provided the basis for my understanding and the start from which research was processed. Other theories have described the career decision-making process, but most use Super's early work as the foundation.

As a student and a college administrator I have studied the workplace and observed occupations available in the community. In the small population I've worked with, women tend to cluster in specific occupations, and few seek less traditional choices. This observation provided the path that this study followed. I have examined the works of several different types of researchers, including feminist researchers – some writing on autoethnography, case studies, and qualitative methods. My style has emerged from those influences. According to Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993) the purpose of qualitative research is to "develop an understanding of individuals and events in their natural state, taking into account the relevant context" (p. 194). Using this premise, this research seeks to understand the process and the ways career decisions are made.

The purpose for the interest in reviewing and using a qualitative research perspective was due to a personal transition and a similar story. My career was well established in the software industry. I had recognition in the community and a great deal of satisfaction in my work. The transition from a successful career to unemployment and being a single parent caused a huge change in my community status, employment, financial stability, career, and vocational self-concept. My voice was gone. I struggled with some of the same issues that are part of this research. As I reviewed and re-examined my vocational self-concept, my values, interests, and skills, my voice returned. I was more confident and clearer in my ability to see the direction I wanted to go. In Getting Smart, Patti Lather (1991), a post-modern feminist theorist, was very clear about the freedom to accept a

different view of research. She discussed emancipatory action, or the freedom of acknowledging the power of the individual. Lather's focus was in enhancing women's place in research by enabling them to talk about their lives.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) autoethnography is a writing style used to describe patterns of cultural experience where the author and her personal experience are part of the focus of the research. The authors also described it as a method whereby the writer could gain an understanding of her own experiences. This presentation style was used not only to tell my story, but to help understand the data and myself as well. My experiences and those of the participants seemed to have some basic similarities, but at the same time were different.

An interesting point made by Reinharz (1992) about feminist ethnography was "…to conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social contexts" (p. 51). As this research was done primarily to understand the practice of career planning decision processes, an ethnographic style can provide a picture, a voice, and a perspective of women in the workplace.

In the work of Bogdan and Biklen (1998) they described applied qualitative research in three categories: evaluation and policy research, action research, and practitioner research. In practitioner research, the investigator is often a practitioner or someone close to a practice who wants to use a qualitative research study to learn to do what she does better. The researcher wants to be more effective in her practice or study how she might improve. The authors continued the discussion by stating that research is conducted for various purposes and audiences. Those

purposes were categorized into two types: basic and applied. Applied research was defined as the efforts to seek findings that can be used directly to make practical decisions about, or improvements in, programs or practices. "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the situation or events of ordinary people in a particular situation. This is the phenomenological approach. They believe there are multiple ways of interpreting experience available to each of us and that is how we create our reality" (p. 28). A research perspective that attempts to describe a culture is referred to as ethnography and the use of "thick description" as an explanation of how they interpret culture and meanings is a component of that method. This describes the "worldview" of my research beliefs.

As I reviewed qualitative research methods, the review of the paradigm shift from the positivist research approach to a naturalistic inquiry was very informative. Positivism has its roots in the scientific method. It was considered a paradigm shift from a pure scientific view. Time has shifted again over the confusion of defining universal truth. Truth can be different to different people and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The movement away from the positivist view comes with a different set of beliefs and a new language to look at research in a different way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Their research led to making a case that a positivistic method of developing theory is non-rational and non-cognitive. With those kinds of statements, another paradigm shift had occurred and the methods used to define worldview for some had changed. This discussion seemed to lead to the use of different methods in

understanding and collecting information. Another argument presented by Lincoln

and Guba (1985) was that positivist research ignored humanness, which is the core

of my beliefs and the core of this study. An additional argument is that the

positivistic method has an assumption that the methodology guaranteed the results

to be free from bias. This cannot be the case in this study, as the researcher has had

a similar experience and would be influenced by that experience. Another factor in

the positivist paradigm is the relationship of the knower to the known. The

positivist view is they are independent of each other. The naturalistic paradigm

accepts that the knower and the known are interactive and inseparable.

The implications of the paradigm shift bring different characteristics to

research. One in specific is the use of the natural setting for research rather than the

isolation of a controlled setting. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined several other

characteristics of naturalistic research methods. They include purposeful sampling,

inductive data analysis, and case study reporting methods. Many of those

characteristics match my research style.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed a generalization being

described as "truly universal and unrestricted to time and space" (p. 114). This

could mean that a generalization will last and is a unique piece of information.

They argue that generalizations cannot hold in all situations, and there are always

multiple possible generalizations to account for a particular situation. This research

project could be studied in different settings with a different researcher's style. The

results might vary depending on the factors discussed above by Lincoln and Guba.

A feminist research perspective tends to use a variety of methods Reinharz (1992). This project developed over a long period of time, and many changes occurred as references were gathered and multiple perspectives were investigated. This method was referred to as a "journey" and this journey progressed through several methodological changes. Reinharz (1992) also suggested these multiple methods help to increase credibility within the research.

The feminist approach is empowerment-oriented in that it seeks to aid individuals in ways to promote change (Reinhart, 1992; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). The approach tries to share the research process with the individual so the individual can begin to take control of her life (Joyappa & Martin, 1996). Women's personal narratives are an important part of the research. Barbre (1989) and Joyappa and Martin (1996) proposed that feminist research inquiry varies according to the researcher's personal life and perspective. According to Cook and Fonow (1986), feminist knowledge includes continuously reflecting on gender relations, including research, raising consciousness as a "way of seeing," challenging the norm in traditional research, and finally empowerment of women. Those research tenets are also part of this study.

Lather (1991) suggested that my understanding of the participant's lives could at best be only partial because my understanding was based on my experiences, and no two people have the same historical-cultural experiences. I will not fully understand the women I interviewed. The themes developed were based on my understanding through the data the participants provided. These data were

screened through my experiences and then processed in the context that I under-
stood. My socioeconomic background, my education, and my life experiences serve
as inevitable filters to my understanding of all of the participants.

According to Lather (1991), feminist research puts gender at the center of
the inquiry. Part of the purpose of this view of research was to take into considera-
tion the other point of view, the other perspective, and what reality means to
someone else. This is a more inclusive view, because our society's more diverse
population fits into the alternative reality, as suggested by the feminist perspective.

The feminist method of research should also empower the participants to
change and to better understand their world (Lather, 1991). The opportunity to
change is based on what can be learned from the interactions between people.
Lather uses the term "multi-voiced" to help weave varied speaking voices together,
as opposed to putting forth a singular "authoritative" voice. As Carol Gilligan
(1982) discussed, the feminist perspective reflects the need for women's voices to
be heard. Reinharz (1992) also concurred that hearing women's voices maximizes
discovery and can enhance the data collection. On the other hand, I recognize that
my voice will be the primary one heard in this research. As Lather (1991) indicates
in Getting Smart, the voice of the researcher can be heard throughout the text.

SETTING

The 1989 Oregon Legislature, working from the Workforce 2000 Act,
authorized the creation of community college skills centers (Program director,

personal communication, April 1998). The purpose of the Act was to allocate funds to agencies that would work with displaced workers for retraining purposes. They would offer basic computer training to develop resumes and cover letters as well as some basic computer skills and they would also include some basic reading and writing skills training. The program was designed to provide students with five weeks of job and career exploration and hands-on computer training. The program also assisted adults affected by changing work demands, downsizing, seasonal staffing, and issues in the community that affected the workforce.

The skills center program used for this study began in 1992 and had served 1,846 students by August 1999. The program moved around a three-county area, and each 5-week session was located in a different community. Each class started with an average of 20 students. Every session had over a 50 percent student completion rate. Eighty percent of the students were female ranging in age from 16 to 76 years old, with an average age of 36. The program ran for five weeks, and then took a week off to recruit and regroup. The program did not run during the summer months. Students met from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The program had two part-time instructors, and each one taught the class two full days per week.

The program was intended to serve the unemployed and the under-employed. Recently injured workers who needed to improve their skills were added. The philosophy of the program "...is based in the belief that most adults like and want to work" (Classroom instructor, personal communication, May 1998).

The program was designed "...to help workers to regain their confidence and

motivation for launching successful and satisfying job search campaigns"

(Classroom instructor, personal communication, May 1998). The career skills

portion of the program was 60 hours, or 50 percent of the total curriculum. The

balance of the program focused on enhancing basic skills and computer training.

The career development instructor expressed her teaching philosophy as follows:

> Let me start with what I believe about it [career exploration].
> I do it because of my belief that it is the most valuable thing we can
> do for people who are outside the system, whether it's because of
> mental health, or emotional health, or physical health, or the need to
> find meaningful work. In finding meaningful work, they improve
> their economic situation as well as their mental health, and so I
> believe the reason I do this is because people can be convinced that
> being stuck doesn't have to be a condition in the rest of their life.
> The goal that I have for students getting out of here is economic as
> well as personal growth. But most of my students are adults, and so
> we find that the bottom line for career planning for grownups is that
> you can have them know themselves and to encourage them to do
> career exploration to know what's out there in the job market. But
> the thing they need most and that they gulp down like water in a
> desert is the self-esteem material, which is information about how
> do I feel better about myself. How do I catch myself doing some-
> thing right instead of always running themes in my head about how
> I'm doing something wrong? How do I change to feelings of worth-
> whileness in the world, how do I connect to people to develop some
> more positive things instead of the negatives?
> My definition of a career is a series of jobs or job tasks using
> a group of related and integrated "functional skills" over a period of
> time. These skill groups are identified by an individual as owned by
> him or her and can be marketed for jobs within organizations or for
> work as an independent business/consultant (Classroom instructor,
> personal communication, May 1998).

The career-planning portion of the program started with training on

recognizing personal values, interests, and skills and matching those skills to

occupations. This method is known as a trait-factor theory (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996) from which several other theories were intertwined. After that training, students were introduced to the Oregon-based Career Information System (CIS) (a computer software program) to learn to research occupations that were available. Before the end of the program, students were instructed in resume writing, cover letters, interviewing skills, and networking. They were encouraged to attend Job Club meetings (semi-structured sessions to discuss employment strategies) after the completion of the program to reinforce their job search and to get back in touch with other students and the instructors at the skills center. The program has had only two instructors since it started. Both of the instructors had continually enhanced the curriculum for the class, but had used the same basic foundation for many years. In personal interviews, they both talked about their strong beliefs in the connection between meaningful work and personal well-being. They were committed to their work and believed that the skills center program could help women move into the work force in more appropriate positions.

PARTICIPANTS

Eight women who participated in the career transitional program at a community college were initially interviewed. To identify the participants, the director of the skills center was contacted and informed of the study. The director went through the student database using guidelines I provided to help locate the participants. The participants were all to be females, between the ages of 30 and 60,

and who had completed the skills center program between six months to one year from the time of the interview. It was important to me in this study that six months to one year had lapsed since the participants had completed the program and had time to act on their learning. The director made the initial contact with the former students and explained the study. If the student was willing to be contacted, the director entered her name and phone number on a list. I made the next contact. The director was not informed as to who was selected. Each of my participants was assured about the confidentiality of the information they were providing (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Protecting the participants' privacy was essential for this study. Their names have been changed in this document, and none of their personal information was shared with the staff at the skills center.

Lists of names were provided in three different time periods. From the first list of women, three were selected to participate. Those selected were willing and interested in the project. After the first three participants were interviewed, a second list of possible participants was acquired, and three more participants were selected. The same process was followed, and a third list was acquired. Two participants were selected from the final list. Since the program moved around a three-county area, some of the students were difficult to contact. Weather barriers were additional reasons why students could not meet with me. This was a factor in deciding the number of women to be interviewed.

Initially, this study did not focus on the age of the participants. After eight women were interviewed, one of the participants was dropped. She was consider-

ably younger than the other women, and a "single mom" with a six-year-old child. Her experiences as a mother, wife, and worker were relatively limited and very different than those of the other women. The focus of the study then evolved from an implied, "all women," to "older women." The woman dropped from the study was very unsure of her skills and potential job opportunities. She could have benefited from more time in the skills center.

INTERVIEWS

The interview is one of the most common and powerful methods used to understand people, according to Fontana and Frey (2000). They can take place in a variety of locations and can be structured or unstructured. Interviews can be used to gather opinions, learn about people, used for political reasons, and many others. Reinharz (1992) stated that interviews have become the principal way to have the participants actively involved in the research process. This means open-ended questions and interviews to gather the information needed. For this project I used a personal interview as my primary method to gather data. After each participant agreed through a telephone conversation to take part in the study, we agreed on a location in which to meet. Of the eight interviews I held, four were in public city libraries in two different communities, one was held in the college library, one was held in the participant's home, one in the career library at the college, and the last was held in her workplace after her work shift. The locations were convenient to the women I met with, and I arranged the times based on their schedules. Several

were during the day, one on the weekend, and the rest in the evening. The interviews that took place in the public libraries were the most comfortable. We were in private study rooms away from noise and distraction. The interview that took place in the participant's home was the longest. There were phone interruptions, general distractions from just being in her home, and more time spent on personal topics as we got to know each other. This was the most enjoyable interview, as we developed some rapport and had a long discussion. The last interview I held was at the participant's workplace. This was the shortest. Not only was she somewhat reserved, but the distractions of staying late and people leaving may have encouraged her to keep her responses short.

I was open about my status as a graduate student in order to help gain their trust. I wanted them to understand my purpose so I could gather the information I wanted. Fontana and Frey (2000) suggest that the interviewer find some connection with the participants to establish trust.

Before we began the interview, the informed consent form was reviewed, and the purpose of the study was explained. The informed consent form explained the project in more detail and how I would use the data I collected from them. When all questions had been answered, the participant signed both copies of the informed consent document, and the interview began. I provided them with a signed agreement, and I kept the other signed agreement. All of the interviews were taped. I again assured each of my participants about the confidentiality of the information they were providing (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

I used an unstructured interviewing format that according to Fontana and Frey (2000) can provide a greater breadth of data than any other type. I used what they referred to as an "open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview." This somewhat informal style was described as allowing the interviewer to answer questions posed by the participants and letting my personal feelings influence me. Most of the interviews were guided and somewhat structured, but when dialogue got out of the direct realm of the questions, I let it wander before pulling it back to the structure. My primary purpose was to listen and then try to understand the women I talked to about their career decision experience.

I shared my background with each participant. Marshall and Rossman (1995) called this "personal biography," and it was done to reassure the participants of my credibility. This discussion usually took place at both the beginning and the end of the first interview and lasted for several minutes. Most of the participants seemed more interested in my teaching duties at the college than my role as a graduate student. I also taught computer classes, and they had many questions about computer use and problems. Field notes were kept of the discussions that were held when the tape recorder was stopped.

The participants and I engaged in open-ended, in-depth interviews. The interviews allowed me to "access the perspective of the person being interviewed... and find out from them things we cannot directly observe" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). The unstructured format allowed the participants to express themselves in ways that were most comfortable, using the "collaborative, equalitarian spirit" that women

use when they communicate (Belenky et al., 1986). Affirming Belenky et al. (1986), the women felt the need to express themselves and their opinions, in their own way in informal conversational styles. The dialogues allowed me to build a picture formed with words as I listened to the participant's personal viewpoints.

Although the discussions were generally unstructured, I used the following "framing questions" to guide the discussions:

1. What kind of employment did you look for after completing the training program at the skills center? What do you now do? How is what you now do different from what you did before participating in the training program?

2. How did you decide on what jobs to seek? Would you have done this before participating in the training program?

3. How did you decide which job to take? Would you have done this before you participated in the training program?

4. What kind of employment did you have before participating in the training program?

5. How did you use the skills you learned in the training program in the first job you had after the training program? If now in a different job: how do you use the skills in your current job?

6. How has your participation in the program at the skills center affected your employment opportunities?

7. Have you used what you learned in the training program in other parts of your life and, if so, how?

8. Of all the things you learned in the training program, what has not been very useful to you?

Although these questions were sometimes used to initiate a discussion, they were used primarily to guide the dialogue. Participants were urged to provide rich details with initial and follow-up questions. Most of the actual questions asked and the order in which they were asked were guided by the conversation so the discussion flowed without apparently being formally directed. Participants were encouraged to take their time in responding. Since this kind of conversation could lead to disclosure of a personal nature not apparently relevant to this study, it was important to me to stay aware of the framing questions. There were some personal disclosures from the women interviewed, but those disclosures were related to the interviews and helped provide background information on each participant.

There was some "reciprocity" as discussed by Marshall and Rossman (1995), in that I revealed my educational background and other experiences when asked by the participants. This exchange of information during the interview helped build the rapport that facilitated in developing the stories.

With these procedures, a large amount of data was collected. I felt a larger picture was being "painted" by the women that influenced how I compiled the data. On the other hand, I recognized the expected variability among the women, since each brought her individual experience to this study. I would have had greater

concern about the data without these differences among the participants. The initial interviews ranged from 75 minutes to two and one-half hours. Each participant received at least one follow-up phone call and some two; the follow-up calls were 15 to 30 minutes long.

Because of the informal structure of the interview process I was able to get better acquainted with some of the participants. Several women recognized me again on campus and we talked whenever we had the opportunity. Some of the women and I are still friends. I attended the graduation of one woman and helped celebrate her success.

ANALYSIS

Analysis started with the first interview. I transcribed the data on the tapes into my word processing software and kept a list of possible themes. After all of the interviews were transcribed, I investigated a variety of computer software programs that might help sort the data. I purchased WinMAX, a scientific text analysis program. The user manual describes the software as "code-and-retrieve analysis." According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), coding text is the "heart and soul of whole-text analysis" (p. 789). This is where the researcher is forced to make judgments about the meanings of a block of text. Another description of the software is a code-based theory builder program (Weitzman, 2000). He described the function of the software as providing the ability to represent relations among codes and to combine some of the codes as additional themes develop. The main task of coding

was to identify themes. When all the transcription was finished, a file was created and sorted into patterns using the WinMAX software. The data were coded and then recoded as patterns became apparent; over 40 different codes were used. Apparent patterns emerged and changed and were replaced over time. Some were immediately evident and quickly coded into the software, and others were identified as I completed the interviews and most of the coding was complete. Some patterns did not become evident until all of the data had been sorted and the results evaluated. Some issues that reflected my own experiences did not show up. This variation and variety added complexity to the data analysis, but also showed how diverse people were and that they were not exactly as one might expect them to be. I merged all of the interviews into one large file and the software rearranged the data in sequence by the assigned codes. I then imported the data back into my word processing software and printed the entire file. It was over 200 pages of single spaced text. I manually reduced the combined groups of similar topics and arrived at several different themes that helped to develop a career decision. Some of these themes included skill evaluation, personal growth issues, barriers and resources, family issues, and aspirations.

SUMMARY

In order to understand the progress of career decision-making, I organized the interviews into a sequential process that accounted for the progression toward a decision. According to Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) vocational maturity is

realized when a person successfully matches their self-concept to occupations.

Vocational maturity is also the way an individual responds to emerging demands,

problems, challenges, and expectations (Jordaan & Heyde, 1979). The sequence

that took place to reach vocational maturity became the order of presentation of the

data in Chapter Four. As the findings were written up, overarching conclusions

emerged. One of the factors apparent in this study was the variability in time that

the women needed to finish the decision process. As the interviews show, some of

the women were still unsure of their options and could have benefited from more

flexibility in the program.

The other area of interest was that that the literature was lacking in the

progression of women making new career decisions in later life. Super (1957b) and

Gottfredson (1981) and then later Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996), and Betz and

Fitzgerald (1987) talk about early development of self-concept and career

decisions. However, the women in this study were older and re-examining their

options later in life, so existing theory seemed to be inadequate to describe the

participants in my study.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

As career theory developed, all of the research literature was directed toward the goal of helping people find suitable careers. This end result, based on the choices made by each individual, was defined as vocational maturity. According to Morris and Levinson (1995), vocational maturity has three components. They consisted of understanding one's self (vocational self-concept), understanding the world of work, and adequate decision-making skills. Combining those skills constitutes vocational maturity in their career choice. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) discussed vocational maturity as the congruence between an individual's vocational behavior and the expected vocational behavior at that person's age. The more mature the individual was, the more mature their vocational maturity was expected to be.

The steps to vocational maturity as examined by this study include examining career patterns, vocational self-concept, career decision, and career implementation. The skills center program, which participants had completed, led the women toward vocational maturity. The first step was to learn about each woman's past employment history. I wanted to understand her prior working experience, her career pattern, and to learn more about each person. This involved each woman describing her work experience from high school, her marriage, and then to the time of her entry into the skills center program. This information

showed their career development. The reason for reviewing past history as a

discussion point was the recognition of her employment background before the

intervention of the skills center program.

The second step in the analysis of the final career decision was vocational

self-concept. In this section, the self-concept – how each woman viewed herself in

her world (Gottfredson, 1981; Super, 1957b), and how she felt about herself – self-

esteem (Neufeldt, 1990), were examined as they related to the woman's vocational

choice.

Super studied vocational interest and how it flowed into career choice. In

his early work, he suggested that vocational choice was a natural part of lifespan

development (Super et al., 1957). Choosing the appropriate occupation could lead

to job satisfaction. Super also stated that "work satisfactions and life satisfactions

depend upon the extent to which the individual finds adequate outlets for his

abilities, interests, personality traits, and values" (p. 9). The basic premise of the

theory remains relevant to my study; understanding and recognizing skills,

interests, and abilities and then matching them to appropriate occupations can lead

to good career decisions and work satisfaction. Super broadened his theory to

suggest that satisfaction is sought in work and that vocational guidance can help

people find that right work (Osipow, 1983; Super, 1957b). According to

Gottfredson's (1981) theory, the women in this study should have made their

vocational selection based on childhood experience. They will have already figured

out their place in gender and socially acceptable occupations.

There are many factors involved in the choice of an occupation. Education and training can help people make more reasoned choices. By making good choices, a person's self-esteem is better and their lives are fuller. A point that Diamond (1987) discussed the difference between a woman's career choice and the job she finally takes. The first part of career choice is generally based on personality, interests, and abilities. However, the second part, what job she might choose, can depend on demographics, economic conditions, family attitudes, and other factors.

The third step to vocational maturity is the career decision. Why do people choose one career over another? What are some of the influences that lead toward decisions? How well prepared are participants to make decisions, and what were the final outcomes? The skills center program taught the participants to examine occupations from several different aspects. The participants were encouraged to use two different computer programs designed specifically for occupational exploration. Each student entered her skills and interests into the computer; the programs sorted through the information, and then listed possible occupations that required those skills. Students were then encouraged to explore the occupations listed through interviewing others in the field, reading books in the career library, or looking at information on the computer.

The fourth step in this examination was career implementation after completing the skills center program. How had each participant used the

information she received from her training? In this section her decision about a career is discussed.

Vocational maturity can be viewed as the culmination of learning about vocational self-concept, career decision-making, and then career implementation. This will be the final step in the analysis of each of the participants in their career implementation.

PARTICIPANTS

The interviews of the participants reflect career decisions made by seven women who completed a program designed to help them move into employment. As the participants' stories unfold, it is clear how the program impacted their lives, helped them to understand their skills, interests and values, and then to move on with their lives.

Each participant is presented as a case. The conversations were not as orderly as the cases are presented, but the information was arranged to help the reader understand the events that took place for the women in this study. The order in which the cases are presented is from what appeared to be the clearest example of a vocationally mature person to the least mature.

TERRI

I think a career is something you go to school to become qualified or get special training some way or another, and is something you want to do for the rest of your life.

Terri was 36 years old and was attending a local community college full-time. This was her first experience in formal education since high school. She, her husband, and their two children lived with her parents. Terri's husband had a work-related injury several years ago, was laid off from his job, and was not working. They lost their home due to financial problems related to his injuries. He had been in manufacturing work doing manual labor.

Background

Terri had low skill jobs from high school until the present time. She explained why she dropped out of the work force after her marriage.

> Before I got out of high school I was working at [a national chain convenience store]. And I worked there, and then I got married, and then I worked there for a while longer. It was just that my husband and I worked different shifts, we never saw each other, and it was putting a strain on our marriage. We both talked about it, and our marriage is more important than this job and so I quit. Well, then I got pregnant with my daughter, and so I was a housewife and a mother for the first ten years. And then, when the kids started to get older and money got tight, well, I decided I'd better go to work.

She had a variety of low-wage jobs, including a short stint at telemarketing and running a family day care in her home. Then she landed a job in a restaurant inside a locally owned grocery store. She described this job in great detail. It seemed clear that she had a strong work ethic and a desire to do well as she described working in several different areas of the restaurant. Her pride in her ability to learn the various jobs and to stay busy and active with both the employees

and the customers was evident. She enjoyed the pressures of the tasks, but also

spoke about wanting to be part of a team effort:

> And there it was basically do everything. You cooked, you
> waitressed, you took orders, made sandwiches, did dishes, you did
> everything. And I really enjoyed that, and I've always worked with
> the public and so it's like I really like my job.
> The restaurant closed when a chain purchased the store. And
> then I ended up going out and being a box person. Which I wasn't
> thrilled about that one. And so they told me I'd have the same
> amount of hours, and they cut me so fast to about twelve hours a
> week. And we were trying to buy a new house at the time, and it was
> like I can't buy a house for this.

Terri did not work steadily outside of her home except before her marriage

and for a short time after. She used the early jobs as an income producer that she

was willing to leave when it was not convenient for her marriage. She reentered the

labor market when her oldest child was about twelve, not because her children were

older or she became single, but because her husband's injury necessitated her

helping to earn the family's income. She seemed to have mostly struggled with

several low paying jobs that were unrelated to each other. Later, her own work

related injury necessitated her search for alternative occupations. Gottfredson's

(1981) socialization theory suggests that a woman will generally stay within the

socioeconomic status of her family. In Terri's earlier occupations, she stayed in low

paying positions. It wasn't until after the skills center training that she considered

moving into a different occupational category that could improve her economic

status.

Vocational self-concept

Terri was very clear on the changes in her self-concept because of the training in the skills center program. The loss of the restaurant job was a big disappointment to her. She had a positive self-concept at that point and was in a position that she liked. She found another occupation in manufacturing and worked there for about three years. She suffered an injury from the lifting and carrying of products and was subsequently laid off because she could not fully perform the job functions due to the pain. She was not sufficiently injured to receive worker's compensation benefits. Her self-esteem at this point had suffered. She was no longer confident about her work or her potential to work.

> I had gotten hurt, and, of course, they denied [worker's compensation benefits] because there was no specific time or date, it was just over a period of time. And then they did a big layoff. Since I couldn't do the work anymore, I was gone. And so I knew that there was nobody that was going to hire me with my limitations that I have, so I went then and decided that I was going to have to go back to school and get trained myself, because they are not going to train me. Because I didn't win my case, so I knew it was going to be all up to me. And so I felt, well, I've been out of school for over eighteen years; I'm not going to start school not knowing anything about a computer or any of that. So I went to the skills center and started to do the lab work in the computer lab and training myself. After the completion of the program, I started in college.

As Terri progressed through the skills center program, her self-confidence and self-esteem grew. She seemed more aware of the changes that she had made during the time spent in the class. She had changed the way she viewed herself. The influence of the work in the program and the result of her personal explorations were more evident.

When I first went to the skills center, my confidence was really low, um, I had very low self-esteem. And everything just felt like it was falling apart. And I thought it was never going to get any better. You know, and it got so deep. What can I do, I thought to myself. Well, you've got to do something and you have to do it for yourself. And so then I went to the skills center, and I had a meeting with the instructor, and she told me, "Terri, you have qualities and skills that you can do." She is a wonderful person. I mean, if you're down, she can get your spirits back up. So then I went, I went through their math test, the reading test, and all that. I pushed myself to finish it. I told myself I have to do this. And I had to do it for myself, and I had to do it for my family. There was several times that I thought about quitting because I felt I was neglecting my family. Well, then I thought, no, I've got to stick with this, and my family supports me. They say, "Do it Mom, you need to do this."

After several months of studying, the instructor asked me if I wanted to take the five-week career development class. And I thought, well let me think about it and let you know 'cause I really want to do this WordPerfect. So the instructor said come to the orientation and find out a little bit about the class and then make your decision. So I said "OK"; so I did and thought, well, what do I have to lose? You know, give it a try and see if there might be something there that might really help you. And it, I was glad I did take the class. It was really neat. I made a lot of new friends in that, and they had me help other students because there was things I'd already done. It was neat. Something I'll never regret.

Terri talked a great deal about the changes in her self-esteem, the confidence she had in her abilities, and the way she viewed her life. She felt stronger about her ability to make change. She was able to move out of what she referred to as depression into a stronger more assured attitude that she would be able to make this decision work. She did say that school had been difficult and the work she had to do was tiring. But she continued to feel very positive about her decision and her ability to move in the direction she wanted.

Career decision

By the end of her training class, Terri was successful in learning more about her skills and abilities, her confidence was high, and she continued to move closer toward her career choice.

> Well, I had already chosen the career I was going into—medical transcription. When I first went in, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. And then I got thinking, well I'm going to have this problem the rest of my life with my back. Well I thought, no, I've got to find a field that I can work out of my home. I thought what could I do that is really going good in the home? And, uh, I found out that it was medical transcription. So I figured well, why not? Why not? I'll go for medical transcription. I do like to type, so you know it. I thought I don't got anything to lose, so give it a try. And so, I just said, well, I'm just going to go for it, and so I was really gung ho on learning the computer, and I did learn a lot about the computer, which made it a lot easier when I went into college.
> Learning the computer there really helped me. And it will help with my career. That was because my career that I'm going into, that is going to be computers. So the skills center did help me get the skills. They helped push me. They helped me keep motivated. There was times I would get really frustrated with the computer. It wouldn't do what I wanted it to do. I just sit there for hours trying to figure it out. And I'm the type of person that likes to try and figure it out on your own instead of asking for help. Sometimes you still need to ask, I know. I felt better, you know, I just sort of asked for more help.

For Terri to enter into the computer training was a decision that might help to change her life. After several weeks with the computer training class, she moved into the skills center program. Terri was determined to finish the program and she made some choices that she wanted to follow through and complete. She seemed to have had the confidence and the support from her family to continue on in school.

Terri had been in the exploration stage during this time period and was ready to implement her plans.

During the interview process I wanted to know more about her decision to choose the career she did. I asked her more about the medical transcription occupation and how she came to select it.

> Basically because I knew that I had to find a career that I could do at home. I did talk it over with my medical doctor, and she told me that would be my best choice ever. And that way I can take work [at home], and if I needed to take a break and lay down, you know, and then I could do it. I did talk to other people about this. My husband worked with a lady's husband, and she does medical transcription out of her home. When she moved here [from California where she had a similar business], she had to get all set back up again. And now she's got local businesses. I also talked to one of the ladies at the clinic about training. She also told me that within ten years there will probably be no transcriptions because of voice activated computers. So I figure I'll take this and see where it goes. Then if I need to go back, I can take another step. And go to the next step into perhaps medical records.

This observation from Terri was especially interesting. She understood that the field she had chosen might change due to technology. She had looked a step beyond her current decision and had projected changes for her future. Her confidence level had changed a great deal, from beginning the program, to making her first decision, and then looking beyond her career to events that could continue to happen. Her vocational maturity might be described as planfullness. Terri learned some new skills in the skills center program, increased her self-confidence, made decisions based on information she found about occupations and the labor market, and developed a stronger vocational self-concept.

As the focus of this study was career decisions, I was interested in how Terri's career choice was made. When I interviewed her, I learned she had spent classroom time using the Career Information System (CIS) computer to learn about occupations. Based on her interest in working at home, she researched home-based careers. The medical transcription occupation was one of several that were identified. The local community college offered a one-year certificate program, so the decision was easier to make. With the combination of her injury, her lack of formal education, and the financial needs of the family, Terri needed an occupation that fit into her lifestyle.

According to Arroba (1977), one of the decision-making styles is the logical style. The most important feature of the logical decision-making style is a cold and objective appraisal; the choice is made on the basis of what is best or what is the best alternative. This seems to fit Terri, as she systematically continued through her options and chose the one she thought she could do in the least amount of time in order to fit her personal and family requirements.

Terri talked about the fact that if she had not attended the skills center program she would have just searched for available employment. But due to the knowledge she gained in learning more about her skills and interests, she was able to explore home-based businesses and to identify the medical transcription career.

She planned on becoming the primary provider for her family. She was hoping to open her business within a year and to help the family find their own

place to live and she would really like to try again to own a home. Terri had a

strong incentive to succeed and a willingness to work hard for what she wanted.

Career implementation

> I am full-time in college. I did have a lot of working my way
> back up after being out of school so long. So I basically had to take
> beginning classes, like beginning math through reading and all that.
> And I did that my first term, and I got from there, my grade point
> average out of my first term, was 3.91. And I had gotten an A out of
> every class. You know it was tough, and you know it was just a lot
> of telling myself, you can do this. It's like it's been different going
> back to school you know after 18 years of being out of school, it's
> like, oh man! It's been a scary step for me.

Terri was well on her way toward the implementation of her decision. She

was accepted into the one-year certificate program for medical transcription and

had completed all of the prerequisites of the program. She expected to finish in one

more year.

Vocational maturity

Vocational maturity is the final action. It is the planfullness that one

displays based on all of the other factors. When a person looks at vocational self-

confidence, and uses good decision-making techniques with valid information, she

can start an occupation that meets her needs. Super's (1957b) theory is that by

matching skills, interests, and values with vocational self-concept, people can make

good decisions and implement their career choices. In the literature from Super

(1957b) and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) vocational maturity was defined as the

match between vocational behavior and the expected vocational behavior at that age.

Terri was demonstrating her vocational maturity at this point, as she had completed her exploration and had used the tools in the skills center for searching various careers that would meet her specific expectations. In the following section, Terri talked about her growth in confidence and self-esteem. Super (1957b) relates vocational maturity to confidence and the ability to make good choices. It is tied to the way students feel about what they want to do for work and their ability to succeed with the choice. However, Terri is relying on stereotypical occupations for women and did not appear to have searched beyond those few choices she found.

> By the end of the program Terri says: "I'm a stronger person. I have more confidence in myself, because I think if I wouldn't have went there I really don't know if I would have went to school, I probably would have thought I'd just try to find something else.
> And then, you know, they really helped me make a decision on, on what you need to help yourself, and we can help you, and we'll give you all the support you need, and we can. I was really down when I went there, because my life was just closing in around me. I felt I was losing everything, I wasn't worthwhile. They showed me that I had qualities and that I can do it if I put my mind to it, I could do it. I had a new home, and I lost it. And so it's like I'm starting over and when I get out of college, I'll start over and I'm going to have that new house. And I'm going to have my own house.

Terri showed what Super (1957b) and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) refer to as vocational maturity. She went through the stages of exploration and was well into working toward establishment. Her success hinged on two major obstacles. The first was finishing the program. She had some financial realities to overcome,

as she and her family still lived with her parents. Her second barrier was putting

together her new skills into a business and seeking clients. She seemed to have the

drive and ambition to make her goal into reality.

Terri's growth was evident from this interview. She could look back and

talk about her feelings of depression and that her lack of skills was holding her

back. She talked about her injury and the pain that she continued to have. She also

talked about her family and how supportive they had been. Her personal strength

was exhibited in her determination to upgrade her skills and look for more suitable

work. Her decision-making strategies have been logical and carefully planned. She

made the decision to work out of her home based on practical reasons and her

occupational behavior was changed by her participation in the skills center

program.

We talked about how she made her decision and what kind of process she

used to decide.

> I just think about what I want, and, if I want it bad enough, I
> just put my mind to it, and that's what I go for.

She was a strong woman and that decision of returning to school demonstrated that

strength. She was asked, "How did you balance both sides of the decision"?

> It just depends, with my decision on the medical transcrip-
> tion, I had to work at something that I would be able to do at home.
> Because I can't stand very long because my legs go numb. And also
> if I walk too far because then it gets so that I can't walk at all
> because the pain gets so bad. My doctors said it will get better over
> time, but I'm beginning to wonder. And actually all it's gotten is
> worse. And so I don't know. I tried to go through vocational

rehabilitation, but I'm not enough disabled 'cause I can walk more than 100 feet, and I can lift more than 10 pounds. My doctor don't recommend it, but I could. And so I don't have a drinking problems, I don't have a drug problem, so they said, "Good-bye." Fine. So you know I lost that. I tried that. I decided, well I'd have to go on my own.

The changes Terri made in her personal growth as well as her vocational growth were demonstrated in this interview.

ALICE

Alice was 48 at the time of our meeting, married, and had three grown children. She was prompt for our appointment and came in with a big smile on her face. She was well dressed and carried herself with confidence. She was employed as a receptionist at an agency that provided services to the elderly. The agency offered home help assistance, arranged for nursing care, and worked closely with agencies such as a non-profit council for aging and for Hospice. After high school she had completed a course at a beauty school and had practiced for a few years. Her husband's job required frequent moves, so she ended up staying home with her children most of their lives. About six years ago, she began nearly full-time and unpaid caregiving for her grandfather and a disabled uncle. The full-time work ended when her uncle died and her grandfather went into a nursing home. She did some occasional work for her grandfather until his death a few months before our interview. She enjoyed the caregiving, but it took a toll on her time. Our discussion

started with her description about her decision to enter the skills center program. Her reasons included some family problems at home.

Background

Alice's work experience had varied a great deal over her life. She had moved from job to job, depending on whether her husband needed her skills in his business or she helped her family. Alice had little control over her vocational life. She held several unrelated positions and due to the family's frequent moves, she was unable to stay in a specific occupation. Since she moved a number of times, she had to continually start over with either a new job, working for her husband, or working in the home.

Vocational self-concept

Self-concept develops over the lifetime. Reading through Alice's personal background she described a past full of problems. She described her life as starting when she was 47 years old. This was when she started taking care of herself and separating from some of the unhappiness of her childhood. She still continued to have problems with her parents, but seemed to be able to recognize those problems as theirs and not hers.

Alice described a very unhappy childhood and current crises with her husband. She spent the last two years working on ways to straighten out her life.

She spoke of the support from her church, self-help books, and counseling as ways
to deal with her difficult arrangement.

> And even before the crisis with my husband I knew we were
> having problems, but at that point, I didn't know what to do. And
> men don't tend to want to get counseling; they think "Whatever, I
> can do it myself." And even before I realized something was going
> on there, I knew that I had family problems.
>
> We got married early; we weren't even 20. And we were
> both just looking for a way out of the house situation. My house was
> ugly, all my life. You know I don't recall much of a childhood. So I
> didn't really have one. I'm making up for it now. (Laugh) We were
> in class one day, somebody said oh, one of the questions [the
> instructor asked], was "What would you want people to remember
> about you when you are at your 100th birthday? What would you
> want them to say?" Everyone in the class said, "I'm not going to live
> to be 100, no way." I said "Why not"? I had 47 years of crappy life
> and feeling bad about myself." I said, "I've got 47 years to make up
> for it." I have to live to be at least 97 or 98, or whatever. You know
> I've got a lot to make up for. I've got to make up for a lot of stuff.
> Now I know what I need to do, so you know, I figured, OK, if it
> works out, great, it can be wonderful and better than it was before,
> and if it doesn't work out, well then I'll know what to do with the
> next one.

Alice showed her coping skills in that she seemed willing to work on her
problems and let go of the past. She talked about having taken some wilderness
survival classes, skiing, and other outdoor activities that were all first time
experiences for her. These were part of the skills that seem to have enhanced her
life.

> Um, the instructor knew what I was going through at home
> with my husband and what was happening. It was, oh probably, I
> have to say it was the worst two years of my life and the best two
> years of my life. I think maybe that makes no sense at all, but it was
> because even though it was a horrible time, I learned about myself. I
> learned who I was, and I learned that no matter what happened, I
> was going to be okay. And that's what I needed, because I come

from a very dysfunctional family, and my parents are, well, there is
a big blow up going on right now.

This is why I felt awful about myself all my life, anyways,
'cause I have controlling, manipulative, guilt-trip parents that if you
don't say what they want you to say, they don't listen. They want
you to talk, but they don't want to hear it. So you know that's where
you're at. And I don't want to go there anymore. I want to be, I want
to do what's good for me and what's good for my family. And its
not getting involved in my family's problems. No, I feel pretty good
about who I am and where I'm going. You know it still might be a
little iffy with me and my husband, but oh well, if it doesn't work,
it's his loss not mine. So I'll just go on from there.

Going to that class was scary for me at first, but after I got
into it, I really liked it. It was something I needed. I needed that time
between taking care of grandpa and my uncle 'til the time I was
really ready to get that job. My husband thought I should have been
out there getting a job. I went without a job for probably, lets see, it
was September to February I was without a job. So, I just kind of
lived on my savings, and, you know, I took the classes; I took care
of myself. In two years I lost 60 pounds, exercised every day and I
never go anywhere without my hair fixed or my makeup on. You
know I was to the point before all this happened that I was just down
in the dumps, didn't feel good about myself, didn't care what I
looked like, wore old baggy clothes and didn't care if the hair was
fixed or the makeup was on. You know, and now you are not going
to get me to out of the house with baggy clothes on or anything else.

Part of self-concept comes with looking at yourself and your life (Super,

1953). Alice had examined her situation and had been working on making changes

to her life. She had learned new skills in coping with family difficulties and at the

same time was working on healing herself. Her employment expectations were

fairly low, but she had learned more about her interests and seemed willing to learn

more skills to progress in her job.

I wanted to be, well, basically just the receptionist. I wanted
to be the "smiley face," the personality that meets people at the door
or on the phone. And, you know, I really didn't think I was all that
good at it, but my boss is always raving about I'm the one that keeps

the morale up in the office, and whenever everything is going to pieces, she said "You can keep us on an even keel." I like that.

Alice was motivated to move into the workplace. She was not only ready to get out of the house, but was also feeling some pressure from her husband. She took the time to participate in the program in the skills center to increase her opportunities for employment. Alice also took the life skills class through the college before she entered into the skills center program. She was referred to the skills center program by the life skills instructor.

Alice claimed not to be much of a planner, but her work at the skills center showed that she could see the long-term benefit of working on her skills and taking some classes. It looked like the college schedule would not match up to her schedule at this time; however, she was willing to work at the goal she wanted through on-the-job training.

The growth and change was evident from Alice's story. She overcame the family difficulties she endured over her life and was working out problems with her husband. She had lost weight and had taken an interest in her personal appearance. When we did the interview she was well dressed, poised, and very professional.

The long-term care for her grandfather and uncle had taken a toll on her, and she was relieved to be moving away from that responsibility. She was confident in her current abilities and anxious to learn more skills. Accounting and bookkeeping came up on the CIS program, and she had done very well in the math

skills training. This stimulated her interest in looking for something more than a receptionist type of position.

Career decision

Alice talked about the success she experienced in the skills center program and how quickly she was able to build her basic skills in math and reading. Her success led her to the CIS program and when she was matching her skills and interests some occupations came up in the area of bookkeeping. This was of interest to her.

> Well I'd heard about the program, you know, at the skills center and how you can brush up your skills and things and I don't even remember who suggested I go, but I went out to the orientation. I worked on the computer and brushed up my math, reading, and writing skills on the Plato [a computer program for academic training]. And, you know, it's surprising what you do remember from high school or from school in general and the things you forget. Because, whoa, you know, I feel really stupid, some of the stuff you know, but as you get into it you remember more all the time. So that was really, I don't know, I think it was a challenge, and I started out with the basics and went through that, and I thought, oh well, I got through this, I'll try the advanced. So I did the advanced math and the advanced reading, and I think I did get all the way through the advanced writing. I was going to attempt the algebra, but I got my job so I didn't get into that. I couldn't put 40 hours a week in an office learning a new job and try and do that too. It was interesting, and I liked it. I also brushed up my typing. That was real rusty; I was a terrible typer. Anyway, the faster I went the more mistakes I made. If I stayed right there at that certain speed, I didn't make any errors, I thought why go faster. If I make all those mistakes, I've got to fix them. So I started over with typing right back at the beginning of typing, and I learned how to type without looking at my fingers. So that was an accomplishment.
> And then I did some ten-key [calculator], 'cause I was really, was kind of hoping to get a job at an insurance company. My niece

worked there, and she wanted me to come on over and gave me a referral. And I went in. I hadn't really done a formal interview for probably 20 years. You know I always got my job, I just kind of filled out an application, you got the job. Or with my husband, I just kind of rolled into the position. No interview, no nothing. And so it was, I was a little scared about the interview. But my instructor gave me sample questions, I went home, and I figured out my answers, and then I took them back to her. And she says, "That's not what they're looking for. Start over." So I went back to work on how to do interviews. We went over all the practice questions and then one of the ladies I play cards with works for the city. She's been involved in interviews before, so she ran me through practice interviews the night before I went. I was always very insecure and scared and going to an interview my knees would shake, and I would be afraid I wouldn't be able to talk. I went in there, I went through the interview, I felt really good about it and when I left I felt good about it.

Alice spent some time with her friends as well as the class instructor

working to develop her skills. She borrowed a friend's ten-key adding machine and

worked several hours to perfect those skills. She did practice interviews at the skills

center and at home with her friends. She seemed very motivated to do well on her

interview. We talked about her career decision and choosing her current position.

She mentioned that from the skills center class she had the confidence to interview

and try for the job she currently has. She said she probably would not have

considered it before the class because she didn't have enough confidence in her

skills. She talked about how she made her decision to apply for her current

position.

Originally when they ran up the CIS, how you pick what you were good at and all those things, what came together for you and where I really wanted to go with it was accounting or bookkeeping or something in that general area. So it brought up a lot of things that related to that, but then I had to decide, well, you know, did I

want to go either part-time and get a degree at the college and pursue a job. And I knew at that point that I had to have a job. And then I'm looking at the class schedule and I'm going, how do you have a full-time job and take these classes, and get a degree without taking ten years? Because those classes don't fit in with your work schedule and, you know, I was thinking about a lot of different options. But fortunately, you know, I don't know, this job, was, just like, ideal for me. I would still really like to take a class in book-keeping, just a class in bookkeeping, not necessarily a degree, but something to help me and maybe another computer class 'cause I still feel kind of scared when it comes to computers. The computer at first scared me to death, I was always afraid I'd erase everything, but they don't scare me anymore. I kind of like them. I did take an introduction to the Internet and that was real confusing, but I have the Internet at home now so if I want to get in it and do something I think I can scoot around there a little bit. So that was interesting.

Well, I really needed the job. If I could have afforded it, I probably would have done it different. I probably would have went in there (the program) and took more classes if I could have stayed and not worked. I probably would have pursued more of the book-keeping end of it, I think. But, I don't know, this job just suits me. I like it, so I guess that I feel that this job was there and must have been where I was destined to be.

This statement indicated her understanding of the depth of positions that could be of interest to her in the future. It did not seem possible to her at that time to return to school for further training, so she accepted a lower skill job. She had learned there was the potential for promotion within the company, and she seemed very interested in pursuing that option. When Alice talked about her success on the Plato program working on basic reading and mathematic skills, she said she realized that she was intelligent and well able to learn the necessary skills for a bookkeeping position.

Oh my typing, getting my typing back up to par, the ten-key, cause the one job I did apply for was insurance billing where you had to have ten-key. I didn't know how to run a ten-key; it was on a

calculator one finger at a time. So, and that I, basically, I practiced it a little bit in the skills center on the computer keyboard. And, um, but the typing and the basic computer, I learned that in the skills center, but just brushing up on my math class and the reading and writing skills, 'cause I needed that in order to be able to type letters for the boss, or, you know, address the envelopes or any of those things that I hadn't done in forever. So those things all help in the job.

We talked about her decision-making and how she decided about moving into the new job and whether it was a difficult decision to make.

No, I really wanted it. I was already feeling pretty good about myself, but it's always nice to get pats on the back, and I got nothing but pats on the back. And, when I went to class, the instructor would say, "All they can do is rave about how good you are. Would you quit it!" I won't be able to get out of here, my head will be too big. You know, so it really felt good to be appreciated. Because that was always hard for me to accept. That I was good enough or that I deserved the compliment. So it was really nice to get the compliments and really feel like I did deserve it. The program was a real eye-opener. I probably would benefit in taking it again, because I think that I probably, um, I got the job before I finished the class so I was still going to the class, and I feel like the last few meetings I kind of sloughed off on my homework and that kind of stuff. I think I would have got a lot more out of it if I hadn't taken the job until I was completely finished. I have one of these one-track minds. You know, I'm always focused on the one thing at a time. But I don't know, I just think it's really a good class to take, and I think that anybody that's having doubts about how they feel about themselves, they should definitely take the class.

Alice seemed to be somewhat rushed to make her decision. She was feeling the pressure of needing to find work and not having the chance to go back to school. She found from the computer CIS program that she has an interest in accounting and bookkeeping. She took the first offer that came to her after she began her job search, and she was hoping to move up within the company to get

into the accounting department. She was happy in the job she had and saw a lot of

potential.

Career implementation

During the time Alice was in class, a job opportunity turned up. She got a

referral from someone in the program and was encouraged to go for an interview.

The timing wasn't perfect, but she felt stronger and more confident about herself

and her ability to get through an interview. She talked about the change in her

confidence level.

> I learned a lot more about myself in that class. And that was a real eye-opener. And it made me feel real good. One of the girls in the class told me about her work. She works part-time where I work now. And she said they are looking for somebody for a receptionist, backup office help, you know, and they need somebody to answer the phone, have a friendly face. Anyway, she thought I'd be good at it. So she brought me an application, and I filled it out and inter- viewed with her boss, and we got along great. I just love my job. That's where I'm at now. I just love it. I'm getting a second raise already. I've been there since February. And so she told me this morning I'm getting another raise. I said "Really? Thank you, I wasn't expecting that." So I've been there since February and a total of a dollar raise already, that's pretty good. [She had been on the job about six months]
>
> But I really do like my job, I like my boss, and I like working with people. And I was still able to (pause). I'm kind of in the same area with, like, caregiving. I'm not the caregiver, but I'm the one responsible now for the [elder care non-profit company] schedule, because our company contracts to provide services out in the field for all the elderly people that are on that service. Either housekeeping, baths, whatever. I schedule that, and I deal with the case managers, I deal with customer or the client. I call them and tell them who is going to be there to take care of them and when. And try to work that out. So I can relate to the caregivers, cause I was there, and I can relate to the people that are trying to set up care-

giving for their families, 'cause we do have private clients also, not just council on aging.

But I don't know, I feel like I'm still contributing to the elderly. I love old people. I like old people. The caregiving part of it I probably couldn't handle anymore, because I get too attached to the elderly. I even get attached to them on the phone. So when we lose one, when one passes away, that bothers me, I'm sad. But I don't know, it makes you feel good that you can help; so I don't know, I just kind of, well, that solved what I needed when I needed it. And I have an opportunity to get into the billing and bookkeeping part of it. And that's what I told her that is what I really wanted to do. I would really like it. The bookkeeper that we have now, she's trying to retire. She's cutting back her hours; she is 72. And she was working 40 plus hours per week, and one of her sisters died, and I think she finally realized that it was time to relax and cut back, so I'm now getting to help her with the billing things. And that's really what I wanted to do is get more into the billing, the numbers, I like that, I was good in math.

Vocational maturity

Vocational maturity is the matching of vocational choice to behavior (Super, 1953). Alice looked at her skills and abilities and made a careful choice about employment. She would have preferred to have more training, but since employment was necessary, she decided to take the position. She talked more about her decision-making skills and some of her future training, but was still unsure about the possibility of continuing her education.

Well, I've never been a very good planner; kind of just do it. In the class, we did have to have a plan of where we were going and how we were going to get there. And you know, I had the different options of taking a class now and then to get closer to what I wanted. Or the, what's the next one, certificate for one year in office administration. That was one of my options, and then it was the other option of getting a degree. And then when I got the job, of course, it would have been to take a class now and then to better my

education in that area. Not necessarily a degree. I had seriously considered the one-year certificate.

As far as her future was concerned she was at the mercy of her husband's work. At that time it seemed that the choice appeared not to be hers. Whether this changes in the future or not depends on Alice's continued growth in self-confidence and vocational maturity. If her job continued to be satisfying and she was able to move into the bookkeeping department, perhaps she would adjust to new responsibilities. Her closing statement revealed her future plans.

> Well eventually, if we don't end up moving, if my husband doesn't get transferred from the area, I just figure I'll just grow with this company. They're building a brand new office building over in the old business district. So in the fall we'll be moving to a brand new building, this is their building so this is kind of neat. Um, and I think eventually I would like to move into the billing, you know, bookkeeping part of it. The bookkeeper will eventually retire and I'll get to work with the numbers more. Scheduling is not what I wanted to do. My boss says I'm a natural at it; I do real well at it, but please don't give me the rest of it. The council on aging people, that part I can handle, but those other heavy duty ones are very high stress. You know, like I said, I've got a lot of years to make up and having fun and enjoying life, I don't want to get into a position where I'm totally stressed out. Like the other person I work with is pulling her hair out or having a fit because nothing is working. I don't want to be that, I don't want to be in that position. I would rather be the backup person, the helper, or being in the bookkeeping where I don't have to pull my hair out because somebody is yelling at me on the other end of the phone because it didn't work. So I think that I would like to take a bookkeeping class and more computer classes and work up my skills.
>
> Oh, I tried to be in control of my life. I just don't want to go there anymore. So you know this, I'm sure I still have a lot of work to do. I'm not perfect. Nobody is, and I just keep working in that direction. I try to keep on top of everything. I'm glad you called, it's been interesting. It's nice to talk to somebody else. Um, I don't know, just trying to continue to work on myself, feel good about who I am, hopefully that I'll be able to influence somebody else in

that direction. Like I said, I have a lot of family members that could benefit from the class. I have so many problems in the family. I just think that we just have to break away from that and do what we have to do for us and stop letting the family interfere and try tear you back down again.

One of Alice's closing statements after the tape had stopped was that she felt the combination of the skills center, the additional life skills class, the skills center instructor, and the women from the class helped to create who she is today. It wasn't just one thing, but the combination of many factors. She was a happy, confident women looking for a good life. I enjoyed her enthusiasm and joy. She made the transition independently, based on what she wanted.

Alice seemed to be content with her life. Things were going well for her, and her new direction suited her. She made the decision to work full-time as a receptionist. Her job brought her back into the caretaking field, but not with direct caregiving. She liked the client base her company worked with and was happy to be able to provide them with a service she knew they needed. She was anxious to continue her work at the company, but was looking to move into the back office and learn the bookkeeping aspect of the business. She was willing to take some classes if necessary for advancement, but didn't see full-time school as an option at that time.

She showed what Super (1953) and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) referred to as vocational maturity. She was in a position that satisfied her interests in working with older adults. At the same time there was the opportunity for advancement into a new field.

JILL

Jill was 36, married, and had two teenage children. At the time of the

interview, she appeared very happy and content with her job and the opportunities

she saw that could be available. We talked at her office at the end of her workday.

The phone rang a few times, and it was interesting to see how well she dealt with

the final calls of the day. She was very outgoing and friendly on the phone, but

seemed shy and reserved during our interview.

> It was March to April this year (that I attended the skills
> center program). The reason why I got involved, I actually found an
> ad in the paper, and I was in a job that I really didn't care for. And I
> called about it, and found out it was Monday through Friday from
> 9:00 to 4:30; there was no way I could do it with the job I had. Well
> then, I got fired. I've never been fired before in my life, and the
> reason I was fired because I refunded a watch for this 14-year-old
> boy. And there was no refund allowed at the place that I worked.
> But I did it anyway; the watch didn't work, didn't have what the kid
> wanted, I gave him his money back. I'd do it again in a heartbeat.
> But anyway, I got fired. So I called the skills center up again and
> talked to the center receptionist, and she said they were completely
> booked up, and I wasn't going to be able to do it. And it was really
> disheartening because I wanted to do something different besides
> retail. Because all I've ever done is retail. Well, a couple of days
> later she called me back and said that a couple of people already
> dropped out and wondered if I could do it. So I was in.

Background

Jill held continuous employment throughout her working career. She

worked in retail sales and had advanced to management in the store she worked in

before the skills center class. She expressed an interest in changing occupations

before the program, but when her job ended, the motivation to change was stronger.

It was the opportunity to make the life change that she wanted.

Vocational self-concept

When Jill was fired, the possibility of change was created for her. It

provided the transition she needed to move into something different. She also

wanted something not as physically demanding as being in retail sales. Her

interests were in office work.

> The skills center gave me a little more confidence on the
> computer. I've never really, I've had one for a year and a half now,
> and never really touched it. My kids and my husband do, but I'm,
> like, not touching that thing. But yeah, they gave me a little more
> confidence on the computer, and then myself. Confidence enough
> that I can do something different. That was what I had in my head,
> I've done retail for twenty years, I can't do anything different. But I
> can.
> Yeah, I was still wanting a change. I was before I had gotten
> fired from my other job, but I would have still done something, but I
> think the skills center kind of pushed me along.
> Retail was killing my body, you know, so I didn't want to do
> that anymore, plus I was burned out on it. I didn't want to do it
> anymore. I still kind of, do the customer service thing, because I'm
> dealing with people who are buying a $300,000 product.
> The skills center career computer showed marketing as an
> interest. That is where I'm headed now. Eventually I'm not going to
> be up front. Eventually I'm going to be helping my boss and that's
> it. Somebody else is going to come up here to do this.

The CIS program matched her skills and interests and showed sales and

marketing as a possible area of interest. These skills were developed over the years

she was in retail sales, but the CIS program presented other options on how to use

the skills. We talked about some of the other portions of the skills center class

besides the basic computer skills. Jill spent some time in the class working on the

computer, learning more about her skills, and practicing interviewing.

> Oh, the instructor. She's a character. She's the one that, um,
> did the confidence type stuff to get ready for interviews. Some of the
> things that she had us do was really interesting. I did the computer
> program where you enter in your skills and learned basically how
> you got to the occupation that you should be in. It was pretty
> interesting how you get up to that point and how it does fit your
> personality and stuff. It gave me some good information about
> myself.

Jill learned more about her interests and skills from the skills center

program, and these skills helped her learn more about how to make the change

from retail. She investigated non-retail occupations and found sales/marketing

options in other fields beside direct retail sales. This interest prompted her to look

in different areas.

Jill doesn't credit the skills center for many changes in her self-confidence.

She had a great deal of confidence in her prior skills and abilities, but some

questions were answered about transferring them to a new profession. The value of

the program, in her opinion, was the practice and skills she learned in interviewing.

She was more self-assured and organized in the interview process. She was able to

successfully use those skills to get employed in a manufacturing firm.

Her position was front desk receptionist and assistant to the marketing and

sales department. She had very few office skills but was able to convince the

company to take a chance on hiring her. She felt that she had a great deal to offer

them.

Career decision

Jill was on state unemployment benefits, and the state required that she accept the first job offered to her that matched her interests. She felt very lucky this position became available, and that she was able to secure the job. Her decision to change from direct retail sales to receptionist was carefully thought out, and her reasons were practical. Jill used a logical decision making style (Arroba, 1977). She was willing to learn new skills and had an overall interest in the company.

> Um, I basically started going to the unemployment office and from there I looked in the paper, of course, got this through the Jobs Plus. They called me and told me I had to come and do an interview period, you know, because I was on unemployment. So I came and did the interview and here I am. And I'm glad I did. I like it out here. The skills they needed, they basically hired me with none. It was a big change. Oh yeah. Big time.

We talked about her decision-making skills, and she stated that she was just ready for a change. She laughed about how she decided, but she had clearly and logically thought out the idea of making a change in her life.

> Burn out. [Laugh] Is that what that's called? Yeah, I was just tired of doing retail. I was tired of the hours, tired of working weekends, um, and like I said it was killing my body, my back, basically. [Was it a difficult decision?] Not really. It was a little scary, but it wasn't hard. 'Cause I knew I was tired of it. I liked it while I did it, but I just got tired of it. The hours, and I got tired of the customers complaining. I was always in management, so I always got the bad end of stuff.

One of the skills that the program taught, and one that Jill got the most benefit from, were the practice interviews. She had little experience with interviews and appreciated the help the class provided.

Yes, I think it helped me. I think so. I had my little questions down that I asked them. I just stayed calm. I didn't get all tweaked out about it. I had to go through four different people to get this job. Um, they are very serious about the person that is up front because that's who greets, that's who answers the phone, and that first impression thing. So. I must have left a good one. [Laugh] My practice interviewing made a difference as far as it gave me more confidence. Yes. It gave me a few more skills that I didn't have before. I mean not a lot, but a few.

Career implementation

Jill was changing occupations entirely. She interviewed for a job at a manufacturing company, and she moved from retail management to front desk receptionist. The skills for these two occupations do not overlap very much, and Jill was not sure she had the skills necessary for this type of work.

I was scared to death, actually, because I couldn't figure out why they would hire me. Not ever being around avionics before, never being at a desk before, I was terrified, and I didn't sleep for about three days. But, no, I didn't have a choice. If they wanted me I had to accept the job; otherwise I would lose my unemployment benefits. The decision was already pretty much made for me. [Laugh]

Vocational maturity

Jill went through the skills center with only the idea of changing occupations from the physical demands of retail sales to office work. She investigated her options and affirmed her interests in sales and marketing. She worked on her computer skills and brushed up on her basic mathematics skills

during the time she attended the program. She practiced her interviewing skills and developed a strong resume.

When Jill left the skills center program, she knew she had to accept a position or lose her unemployment benefits. When the interview came up with the manufacturing company, she was able to convince them that she would be their best choice for the job. They hired her without basic receptionist skills, but apparently realized the potential she had for long-term success with them. Jill was very happy with her job and was looking for ways to move into full-time sales and marketing.

> I don't regret my decision to take this job. No, I love it out here. I really do. I'm happy with my job. I love my job. The people that I work with, which I basically work by myself, I work with the Director of Sales and Marketing sometimes. Most of the time I'm by myself. But all the engineers and all the guys that are out there and the girls building the product, they are really a bunch of nice, neat people. And they have made me feel welcome out here.
>
> [Do you have any additional comments?] I can't think of anything, except for at the time I really needed to be around positive influences, and the instructors were very positive ladies. Very positive. And they kept everybody upbeat and me in particular, and I just liked them and really enjoyed going there. I looked forward to going there every day. Yes, the decision to make the change was a little scary, but I'm glad that I did it. I have this goal to get more involved with sales and stuff and learn more about their product, and I'll go from there.

Jill seemed to transition smoothly from retail sales to manufacturing and from supervisor to receptionist. She could see that there might be a future for her if she stayed. Based on the results from her career computer searches, she reaffirmed

her interest in sales and marketing. Those skills seemed to surprise and interest her, but were most likely developed from her years in retail sales.

Jill seemed to have made a good decision and seemed to be happy. She made the transition she wanted and was successful. The skills center program made some contribution to her decision. She achieved strong vocational maturity based on her previous experiences, on her time spent in the program, the feedback she got from the instructors, and the work she did on the career computer.

BONNIE

> I have no idea what the word career means. That's why I am having such a hell of a time finding one.

Bonnie was 56 years old and had three adult children who lived in the Seattle area. She was also the legal guardian of her granddaughter, aged 14, who was autistic and a special needs student. The granddaughter was enrolled in the special education program at a local middle school. Bonnie was currently legally separated from her husband of 35 years.

> I moved to Oregon in 1990 because we were retired. I have a granddaughter that I'm raising, and she started school, so right back to the old grind. But she's also a special needs child, so there are a lot of challenges. Several years after we moved here, I decided, I took a class at the college, the skills center class. I was working at a local hospital as the volunteer coordinator and in the surgery lab. I got paid for about five hours per week, but worked about 20. But it was a great job, and I loved it. After the skills center class, I realized that I needed to be paid for my time. My time was valuable, and that was one of the main things that I got out of that class. Even though I've always been one that volunteers my time, and because I

generally build in the areas that make me feel very good, they make me feel like I'm giving something.

Um, before I was just, I had really no idea what my skills were or where I was, where my strengths were. Now I <u>know</u> where my skills are and where my strengths are, so I know more or less where to focus and where not to focus. I know that I would never be good at an office job. It would be pushing me. That's not me, and I wouldn't even accept one. So I know that I have to work with a lot of people and incorporated in that I have to work with a lot of different things going on. I love challenges. [Laugh]

The skills center class made me open my eyes to a world that that I could have some freedom that I had always been wanting. And that it was possible it was always a big dream, but I had no idea of how I could get there. And I didn't have the support. So after taking the class, I realized I had a lot of people who could support me and would support me. And one of the people that was one of my big supporters was in my skills center class. She was a MSW from Mental Health. She had a lot of answers to a lot of my questions and could send me in the directions that I needed to go to find out more about what I needed to know. So that was a really big step.

Background

Bonnie worked most of her adult life until her husband's retirement. She worked for the federal government and then as a reading aide while raising her family until they moved and retired. When they took on the obligation of raising her granddaughter, she started part-time unpaid work at the local school district. After the separation, she started serious efforts toward seeking paid employment. The change in her family structure and the need for her to earn her own income drove her back into the workplace.

Vocational self-concept

Bonnie went into the skills center program confident that she was going to build up her computer skills and go back to her current job and demand more money and more hours. During the time she spent in class, the hospital she was working for changed her part-time job to a volunteer position. Bonnie became quite confident about her skills and abilities and decided she was not going to give them away as a volunteer. The skills center program offered her some new choices and options, and she explored them in-depth. Her confidence in her choice of entering into public relations was strengthened over time, and she researched the field very carefully.

She was very determined to find a job that suited her skills and interests and one that she would be happy doing. She was willing to wait for the opportunity and was continuing to upgrade her computer skills. She had decided that neither a formal training program nor classes at the college were what she would like to do. She loved to learn, but it needed to be on her own schedule and timeframe, not the formality of school. She spoke about some of the new skills she learned, as well as those that have emerged from the skills center program.

> I don't know, I think I've probably always been assertive,
> but I've always had to keep it in check. My husband had such a
> horrible temper that you could not say what you were thinking. But
> in little ways, I think I've always been assertive, I always took the
> classes I wanted, and did some of the things I wanted. If I wanted to
> take ski lessons, I took ski lessons. If I wanted to go take a class, I
> took the class. If I wanted to go to work, I went to work. So I think
> in those little ways I was assertive, but now that I don't have the
> threat of violence over me, I can say what I want and do what I

want. And I sometimes have gone too far the other way, and now I kind of have to kind of learn to make sure I at least have a win-win situation for both people involved. Not just me.

A lot of the skills I had, but a lot of them I've enhanced them maybe about 90% as far as being able to clarify exactly what I want and what needs to be done and what I want goes. I think that's a lot of what the skills center taught me. Which a lot of that basically what the curriculum is, to teach you those types of things. Or enhance them. I think making me aware of what my own qualities, personality, and what my skills could mean to me if I so choose to use them. That being my choice. They're there, and I've been taught those skills, but it's my choice whether I go out and use them. It's my choice whether I go back to school and enhance those skills which I'm not willing to do. I think, um, I'm not going to let anybody control me right now. I'm going to be in control of every situation. And I think that it's because of so many years that I wasn't in control. And it may turn around; it may turn around too late for me. Ha, who knows?

And like I said before, it's not because I don't like to learn; I do like to learn; it's I don't like the structure of the classroom. I don't like the control of the teachers over me, um, what you have to learn, and what she expects me to learn, and your grade.

Yes [the skills center class] helped me a lot. It made me aware that my time was valuable and not to work for free. It also made me very aware of how many skills I do have and what my strengths are. Um, and where I should be looking for a job and the type of career I should be looking for; which would be in personal or public relations.

At that point Bonnie had a clear direction that she wanted to explore. She

spent a great deal of time on the CIS computer doing career exploration. She had

been out in the community talking to people in various jobs and learning more

about what was involved in seeking a career in public relations. Her self-confidence

was strong, and she had set some clear goals.

Career decision

Bonnie was very motivated in her career decision-making. She had been

doing information interviews and collecting career information for quite some time.

She had been working in two part-time jobs as she continued her search. She had

some retirement money that she collected from her husband, so she was not

required to work full-time to make ends meet. Her adopted daughter was a problem

in that Bonnie was seeking help for her daughter during the time she started her job

search. Bonnie wanted to place her daughter in foster care, but was unable to find

the right situation for her. That took up a lot of her time, not only with caregiving,

but trying to find resources to help deal with the health disorder.

> Right now I don't have any career decision, real definite,
> other than I like helping people. We went through a lot of informa-
> tion, and there were some things we did on the CIS computer. It is to
> kind of steer you into something that you are interested in.
> [Did it for you?] No, actually when I went into that class, I
> knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I was going to use that class
> as a guide to get me there. What I was going to do with my job at
> the hospital was I wanted to go back to the director of the hospital
> and say, "These are my skills and this is what I can do. I would like
> more hours and I want more pay." By the time I got through that
> class, I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do.
> [What happened?] I don't know. But I was totally confused;
> I was totally without even an idea of where I wanted to go. Other
> than I knew that I was very good at public relations. So I still
> haven't figured it out. [Laugh] But it also opened a lot of other doors
> that I wouldn't have had options to.
> [Do you think it would have been any different if you didn't
> have a preconceived notion of what you wanted to do?] Yes, I think
> it would. Because I don't think I would have been as narrowed into
> this is what I want to do and this is how I'm going to do it. Although
> in a way that is exactly what I wanted to do. One thing I've learned
> is to go with my gut feeling and not let other people input their
> decisions on me. I just learned to make a decision and go with it and

not just listen to other people and evaluate what they are telling me, but go with my decision. Basically I go with how I feel about it. That's my biggest way I deal with it, is how do I feel. Does it make me feel good? Does it make me feel really tense or nervous? Can I see opportunities even though I may like what I'm doing? All of it right now or can I see opportunities down the road that it can build on? You know, and so it will be okay, because I can add other things to it. Especially jobs that I may not even want in the beginning, if I can see other ways of adding things that I like to do and I can put that in the job, then that's the decision and those are some of the factors that I can use.

[Would you consider the negative side of those things?] Absolutely. And the last job I took that I still have is, um, there was a part of the job that I absolutely could not do. And I went back to the boss and I told her that, I asked her how important this part of the job was as far as the total job. And she said, "Very important." And I just basically told her she had her job back; I couldn't do it. And it shocked her. And she said, "Oh, you really mean that?" I said, "Absolutely."

It was just, it wasn't values, and it wasn't career goals, it was just something internally I could not do. And part of the job that I was to do is go into a nursing home and work with people who were totally handicapped, and I could not do that. I work with handi-capped people in the skills center, but that was entirely different, as these people are mobile and can take care of themselves, are looking for a job, are there because they want to get the job. Um, and they might have the education and skills to do that. People in the nursing home are not ever going to get out of there and get a job. So all you are doing there is spending time, wasting my time, I felt, and I felt that what they wanted me to do over there the activity director could do. And that job was being paid to do that.

In my job search I don't even look at the paper because there's nothing in the paper that's going to be, going to serve me. I basically contact – it's usually mostly networking. And, um, or if I think of a company, or I hear of a company who I think might be fun to work with or I want information from, just so I can pass it along, I would just contact them directly. I do that especially for people that I'm working with, especially special needs people and ones at the skills center, or my daughter, I call and I make contact with these people and let them know where I'm at, what I'm doing, and what, um, and especially call about a specific person to see to what they have to offer, that person I might be working with.

Bonnie was interested in seeking a position in public relations or working with the public in an active way. She was not skilled in office work and was not interested in those kinds of occupations. The public relations areas that she was looking at required more education than she had, so she evaluated each option carefully before deciding to look more closely. She did many information interviews with businesses and organizations to find out what kinds of skills were required and how she might fit.

Bonnie's decision-making skills were centered on what seemed right for her and felt like it would be a sound decision. She was concerned about not letting the input of others overly influence her; she wanted to be the decision-maker. She used an emotional style of decision-making (Arroba, 1977).

Career implementation

One of the skills that Bonnie learned and enjoyed the most was the information interview. This was a process of interviewing people who worked in occupations of interest. When she went through the process of examining her interests, skills, and values, several different occupations were presented to her. She systematically went through each one, and then chose someone in the community who had a similar occupation.

At the same time she was searching for occupations, she also investigated options for her granddaughter. This additional responsibility added a separate layer of complexity to her job search and decision-making.

One of the biggest things I learned from the skills center class is how to do informational interviews, and I think they are absolutely the most fun. I have such a good time doing them, Um, because I get to end up asking all the questions and I get to get answers to what I'm looking for. I'm always adding people to my list of people who can help as far as where to send people for different types of things, such as getting the agencies that they may need to contact, they may not always have the answers, but they can always, maybe, suggest someone else. So it's just a big networking way of advocating for me and others that I help.

She had been working several jobs since the completion of the skills center program. One of the longer-term part-time positions was for an agency that worked with people with disabilities, helping them build their basic skills for a job search. This fit into her background of working with her granddaughter and finding resources for her. That job also fit into the area of personal relations, as she was helping others. She worked in the computer lab at the skills center and was in constant contact with the staff. She continued to look for other opportunities, as the grant that funded her position was due to expire.

Vocational maturity

Bonnie had a good understanding of the need to find the right kind of occupation to match up with her skills. She had about two years of education through various community colleges but had not earned a degree. She was not interested in attending a formal educational program. She stated she loved to learn, but it needed to be at her pace. She wondered if she would be able to match up her interests with a meaningful position.

I think I will find it. I'm looking. It's just that I have to make the decision probably to go back to school and get more education. And I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. It's not that I don't enjoy learning, because I do enjoy learning. No, the only things I'd like to tell is, I'd like to be able to find someplace for me now. A job that I really felt good at, and I really could expand and it could be something that could carry me on until I decided that I didn't need to work anymore.

Bonnie's story revolved around how she could find a job suitable to her interests. She was very interested in public relations and working with others. Her granddaughter's medical condition had provided a number of resources for her and even some job opportunities, but not exactly what she wanted. Her plans were to continue to work at two part-time positions until she could find just what she was interested in. She had an upbeat attitude about her potential success and indicated that she was willing to work hard to overcome the barriers that got in the way.

Sometime after the interview I spoke with Bonnie, and she caught me up on one of her part-time jobs. She was working for a real estate agent as his assistant. This position required that she contact potential customers with cold calls and letters. During my follow-up call with her she addressed an envelope to me and enclosed her business card and that of the realtor she was working for. She was also taking the course to get her real estate license. This program was a self-study course that she could do on her own time and at her own speed. She seemed very happy with this job and was anxious to finish her license so she could do more of the work with her customers.

Bonnie described her career search as finding something in public relations, not general office work, that did not require a formal traditional education, and had contact with the public. She had transitioned into a job that suited her requirements. She seemed satisfied with the decision and was working hard to get her license and move into full-time work.

PATRICIA

Patricia was a 41-year old single parent with two teen-aged daughters. She had not seen her husband in over two years, "because he sexually molested my children." She does not live with her parents, but they support her financially. At the time of the study she was a part-time student at the community college majoring in Business Administration. This leads to an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree after two years as a full-time student.

> Yes [I attended the program] Spring of 1999. And, 'um, it was very educational. I enjoyed it thoroughly. I learned a lot, I realized where I was in a lot of things that I thought I was better at than I really was. I got my hand on the computer; I got to work with it in the first time in ages, 'cause I didn't have one up until the last couple of weeks. The teachers were understanding; they helped us with everything. They taught us to look at our life as, well, like a loaf of bread that hasn't been completely formed yet. No matter how old you are, there is always something new ahead of you. It depends on which way you turn in that fork in the road as to what's going to happen next. And that's what they were teaching us was what's going to happen next depending on whether you want to take the left turn or the right turn or if you want to forge straight ahead.

Background

Patricia's description of her spotty employment shows a long history of changing jobs. She talked about an obligation to work on the family farm every summer to help her father. During the rest of the year she moved from job to job. From her conversation it seemed that she had difficulty in accepting that someone younger than herself could be her boss. She indicated her displeasure about having to take orders from some "kid" who could tell her what to do.

When we talked about the skills center and how she got into the program, I was wondering what type of work she would be doing had she not entered into the program. I was wondering what her future plans were.

> I don't know. I been talking about going back to school for a long time with my parents. But I have a feeling I wouldn't have been able to talk them into it unless I had gone through the program, and they wanted to see how I handled that first. If I hadn't, I probably would still be trying to look for a job and having no luck. Because I refuse to push hamburgers across a counter to kids that are younger than me [and they make more money than I do] and take orders from someone that is younger than me. I can't handle it.

There was continued evidence in her discussion about authority and how she dealt with it. She seemed to be very independent, but at the same time unsure of her skills, abilities, and how to work them together.

> And, um, before I even went into that (the program) I was working; oh, I worked here and I worked there for a little while, but none of it was satisfying, and I have to enjoy what I'm doing, before I can really do it and put my heart and soul it to it. And I can't be the type, the little robot that shows up at work and works eight hours and leaves. And it goes back to the first question, what type of employment do you look for? Well, I'll look for something that satisfies me.

Yes, its got to be something you enjoy, that you like to do, that you're not going to go, Oh god, now I have to get up and drive 15, 20, or 30 miles to work, and I have to smile for eight hours, and I have to go home and I hope my children have had a good day, 'cause if they haven't, I going to be in a bad mood, they're going to be in a bad mood. Growl. I just look at it that way, you know. But I did before, I worked at [fast food restaurant], worked at [a different fast food restaurant], um, I've worked a lot for my dad. I've tried getting jobs at places like excavation places, you know that go out and they make roads and put in footings for buildings and all this and that, 'cause I know how to operate a backhoe – I know how to do that. But no one will hire me without a certificate. And so I figured "*yent*" to you. It's your loss.

Vocational self-concept

Patricia mentioned the family farm several times during the interview. She grew up in that environment and had worked summers there for many years. She talked about her mother's garden with pride, in that she kept a half of an acre in vegetables that provided produce for family and friends. Patricia and her mother were part of the Master Gardener program through the Extension Service. We talked a little about her background before entering the program.

I have a farming background. That's why I'm not going to school summers, 'cause I will be working for my dad. That's why I didn't finish my first try at being a real estate agent because I had to stop three months and work for my father during the summertime. And he pays my tuition; he pays everything, so I better help him when I can. I used to [live on her family farm], but I don't anymore; I have my own place. I liked living on the property. But my father got it into his head one time on a trip that he was going to die in the next year and a half and this was eight years ago. And he went out and made sure my sister and her husband already had a nice place, they just had a house built. But my brother and I didn't have a place of our own. We either lived on the farm or we rented. And so he

made sure we each had our own place. With a house. Actually it's a trailer.

We discussed the program and how she had chosen real estate as a possible career. She indicated that she had "pretty much" decided on it before entering the program. She talked about the process she went through to help with her decision.

> Well, I know what I want to do in my life. A real estate agent. I mean that the opportunities around here are just popping up left and right. Houses being built all the time. People selling, retirees coming in from all over the country. How did I choose that? I have no idea about that, other than I did not want to operate a slother or backhoe all my life.

> It [the program] reinforced it to the point that I know what I have to do now to get through college. And then I can become what I want to be, a real estate agent. I know quite a few people that are real estate agents, because my father does a lot of buying and selling of property and renting and such. I guess I look at what they do and how they do it. I'd love to be able to help young married couples find a house that is right for them. Not a $80,000 or $90,000 or $100,000 house they can never afford to buy. They are on a half-acre that they will outgrow in you know six months. I want to get them on, ah, start them out small, work their way up. And I know that is what it takes because I've gone through the whole process. And I watched my father help other kids, and I want to help them, you know. And I've got two teenagers coming up that someday they'll have to have a house. And I want to be able to help them out. And you can't help your own kids and other kids you know that are headed into that unless you've got the background that you need. And I figured that real estate agent, everyone has to have a place to live, put the roof over their head and the smartest way of doing that is owning a place, not to just rent. A lot of it I had already had my mind made up before.

It was interesting to note that she talked about helping people buy acreage property. Her price range seemed unrealistic for property in her area, and she assumed that her clients would be farming and that she was concerned about them needing larger property so soon. She also gave me an example of someone with

annual wages of over $200,000 and that they would not be able to afford property worth $200,000. She seemed somewhat unsure of property values and income.

She also mentioned that she had previously started the real estate course. She had purchased the books and had spent some time in the training. She said that she had to quit to farm for her father in the summer. She should already have some idea of property values from both the course lessons taken so far, and the dealings her family has had in selling and buying real estate, but she seemed somewhat confused.

Patricia admitted to having an anger problem that she worked on in the class. During the interview she seemed somewhat offended that anyone would question her decision. She said she learned a great deal about herself and her skills. She seemed confident in her decision, but I wonder if she chose this field to please her father, or because she is really motivated to go into it. She did take the time to research different occupations and talk to others in those fields. She was going into this long-term goal with a great deal of information. She used a logical style to make this decision (Arroba, 1977).

Career decision

As we discussed her career decision I asked her about the experience in the skills center program and if she used the resources.

> That's where I did some of the research on the, um, real estate. [The CIS program on the computer?] Yep, we had lots of fun. We spent three classes going through those and getting onto that

and, well, let's see, this is what the education and background we
have, let's see what we're good for, and we could do. A lot of it, I
had already had my mind made up before. Yes, it was worth the
time we spent.

Well, my [long-term] procedure was going to school and
then getting my AAS degree in business, and then taking that one-
year course or however long it takes in real estate, and then getting
my license. That's my goal. I like being my own boss if I can just
get myself to do it, you know.

We talked about other options besides real estate. She had looked over her

community and seemed to understand the options available to her. She knew that it

would be difficult for her to be an employee for someone else, so she discussed that

she might have limited options.

No, I have no idea other than I've looked around, and I've
gone through a lot of soul searching to decide what I wanted to do.
And, yes, there are a lot of other things that I could do, but, right
now, I've got my heart set on [real estate]. And, you know, even if
my dad was to hand me the farm right now, I could handle that, but I
would still want to be a real estate agent. And I could do both of
them. I could the farm during the summer and I could still have time
for real estate. I know a lady who works right out of her home. Most
of the work she does is in the evening, and she goes to the office and
she visits with people and she talks to her customers, but most of the
hard work she does at home.

Oh yes, I know about six different people that are real estate
agents, and they all, they haven't have a lot of time to sit and talk to
me 'cause they are busy. But it's a growing field. And that's what
I've been told by everyone, that it's a big growing field.

Her statement indicated to me that she did not spend very much time talking

to others in the field. I asked her specifically if she was motivated to be a self-

employed business owner.

As I said before, I don't like taking orders from someone
else. Oh, yeah, I like being my own boss if I can just get myself to
do it.

Patricia did the research for the real estate job during the time at the skills center. She said she had made up her mind before the class, but the CIS program and the interaction in the group made her more confident in her choice. She spent some time in the field doing information interviews with people in her community. She started the real estate program before the skills center but was unable to finish it because of her obligations with her father in the summer. She took the licensing test and did not pass. She continued to work on the farm with him each summer and planned to attend school the rest of the year.

Patricia's reasons for seeking self-employment might come from her inability to relate to others, or deal with younger authority figures. During the time she worked for her father she observed many real estate transactions and appreciated the value of the service she could perform. She spoke of wanting to help others seek their first home. She felt strongly about the value of home owning rather than renting.

This was a very long-term decision. She was seeking a two-year degree in Business Administration and planned to take about ten credits per term. She also needed some remedial work before the general education classes. At the end of her degree, she planned to start the real estate program again. It could be as long as three years before she completes both programs. She seemed realistic about the timeframe, but was willing to take the time. She worried about not being able to handle too many classes, as she spent a lot of time with her children and did not want to give that up.

Career implementation

Patricia enrolled in the local community college as a part-time student. She had about an hour commute each way to get to the college. There were some distant education options and some classes held in her community, but she had not investigated them at this point.

> Yes, I'm in the business department. I just started. This is my first term. The skills center program taught me some more of being under control [anger management], because they did a little section on that. I was able to improve my math scores so I got a little better at that. I learned some of my [other skills], I learned where my reading and writing was and did a little more work on that so I could get into the class I'm in now on writing. [She is building her basic skills before taking the required coursework.]

I asked her if she had considered other options besides real estate. I wanted to confirm that she had spent some time looking at all of her skills and interests before locking herself into her decision.

> No, I haven't really decided or thought about that. Because there are not a lot of opportunities around here for a lot of different things, and I'm not leaving. I like this area. My kids are the type that, "Mom we've got to move, I hate little towns, I want a big city," and I'm going, "No you don't, at least not with me around you don't 'cause I can't stand the closed-in feeling." You know and, um, but if it goes to jobs, I want, I don't know, no matter what I do, I'd have to live out here and I would rather live out of town, uh, I don't know what else I could do right now.

I was interested to hear about her knowledge in the real estate field. Because of her discussion of questioning authority I wondered if she understood the structure of a real estate business and some of the duties she would have. I asked her several questions about working in the office at a real estate agency.

Oh yeah. But I'm hoping that after they train you and if you get into a good real estate office even though you've taken your classes and gone through your business and you've got your licenses and everything that you need, that doesn't teach you the aspect of here are 200 forms fill these out for the customer. And if you get into a good office, they will teach you that stuff before they say there's your desk and here comes your first customer. You know, and I'm hoping that I'll be able to handle that part. 'Cause it's like any other job, you have to learn before you're good at it. Before you're comfortable at it. Oh yeah, I know you have to work for a broker and anything that is paid into the firm is paid into the broker, and the broker divides it up among his agents.

[I asked about being on total commission] To a certain extent. Yet you also get paid whether you do something or you don't do something as long as you've helped. So, I'm not saying it would be the greatest income if you didn't do a lot, and you have to dress a lot nicer than the farm person would. You know you have to look presentable at all times. And I supposed they would want me to drive something other than my little purple Nissan pickup. That's too bad, I like my little purple Nissan. That thing gets me around.

Well, my procedure was going to school and then getting my AAS degree in business and then taking that one-year course or however long it takes in real estate and then getting my license. That's my goal.

I wanted to verify if she was going to work on the degree at the same time as studying for her real estate license.

No. Do one then do the next. But I have to earn the money in order to go into the real estate school again. So I've got the books, so I don't need the books. At least I can just take the course; I won't have to buy the $60 books. The books are there, too, and the course just reads along the books. So I could be studying them at the same time I'm going to school. But right now I'd just rather study what I'm learning.

Vocational maturity

Patricia was involved in implementing her decision. She was in her second term as an almost full-time student. Her grades were good, and she had a confident attitude about her ability to succeed.

Interviewing Patricia was very interesting. On the surface she indicated that she had grown in her vocational self-confidence from her experience at the skills center. She was confident about her career decision and had taken the time to do research on her career. She knew her community and saw the potential for a successful career. But when you looked under the surface, she talked about anger management training that was helpful to her. She talked about not wanting to take orders from other people. She indicated from the interview that she was a very strict parent, and her teenage daughters were held accountable for their every action. She spoke of having some problems with her oldest and how she was going to reduce her privileges until she behaved the way Patricia expected.

She also spoke about the family farm and her commitment to working summers for her father. She sounded like she wanted the real estate job to hold her over until she could do the farm work. She would like to combine them.

Patricia did not seem to be vocationally mature (Super, 1953; Osipow and Fitzgerald, 1996). Her long-term goal seemed very ambitious for a person who did not hold jobs very long. She had made a huge commitment to the community college program. The commute in the winter will be discouraging, raising her

daughters by herself will take extra effort, and the pull between her independence and the family farm will continue to be there.

She did seem to have confidence in her decision and had the financial assistance from her family to continue to take classes, but her expectations in the real estate field were unrealistic in several ways, including that she would work only with young couples. If this is her expectation, then her earnings might not be sufficient and she would not be committed to gainful employment.

JOANNE

Joanne was 44 years old, and married with three teen-age children. Her husband was self-employed and worked out of their home. Joanne was a stay-at-home mom but was looking to get back into the paid labor market. With the rising costs of health care, she was looking for something with medical benefits. They dropped the medical coverage on their children when the premiums got too high.

> I had gotten really depressed two years ago and suicidal, and I started telling myself I had to do something different; this was the wake up call. You know, I needed to start looking; I needed to start exploring different avenues. So last year, a year ago, I went to (a displaced homemakers program through the community college) and a couple of the girls or somebody mentioned the skills center program. I was just really curious. So I went up there, and the curiosity got me to sign up for their class. I just decided that I would start pursuing some personal interests. And when I'm determined to do something, I can do it. My husband was very, very upset that I did that. And he is still upset. So it means I did the right thing. [Laugh]
> I took the five-week class, and it was wonderful. I wish I could go back and take it again, but it would probably be too much. 'Cause it's pretty involved, and I thought it was going to be job

search, and it was more of a personal search to find out what really makes you tick and what can really give you some job satisfaction. And so during the course of five weeks, I really discovered a lot about myself. I had been going through some personal growth anyways, but that really kind of cemented it. And especially looking at my past where I had been, and what I wanted, and where I got messed up in the process, and trying to discover how to get back there again.

Background

Joanne was mostly a homemaker during her working career. She was home with her children, she did some occasional work for her husband's business, did some in-home day care, sold personal care products, and set up a housekeeping business, but had not worked steadily. Her youngest was ten, and she was seeking outside employment. She had not decided if this new work would be full- or part-time. She was motivated to work only to help provide some family income.

From the description about her husband, it seemed that just getting out of the house might be part of the reason to seek employment. Their relationship sounded somewhat shaky, and her success might cause further problems.

Vocational self-concept

Joanne did quite well in the skills center program. She did an activity called a lifeline where students lay out their life stories in either a pictorial or chart format. They make note of the highs and lows and then have the opportunity to evaluate and look closely at them. Joanne talked about her highs. She was employed right

after high school in an office that handled medical records. She was the errand

runner, the assistant, fixed the copy machine, and did other general office duties.

She remembered this as being an important part of her working life. She had a lot

of fun on the job and enjoyed the interaction with her co-workers. She also

reviewed some of the low parts of her life as well.

> Well, pretty much it (the program) helped by making me
> clear on what really makes me tick. Which I had forgotten all about.
> I had three kids, and I have an abusive husband, and I was just so
> muddled and in everybody's livelihood that it was hard to take time
> for myself. And I gave that time to myself and that was it.
> Yeah, and that was the other thing I found when I was up
> there. There were three men in our class and all of us would have
> lunch together. One of them was attracted to me, he still is, and
> that's okay. He was so cute. He's handicapped. He's a nice man. He
> said to me "Your husband is really excited that you're doing this
> class isn't he?" I said, "No, he's really opposed." "Your husband's
> not encouraging you?" And I told him my husband has never
> encouraged me to do anything. And that was an eye-opener. That I
> never knew a man was supposed to. He goes, "I would encourage
> my wife to make some positive moves in her life." And I thought,
> you know what, that's true. Some men would be encouraging. I've
> got this very discouraging man and that was an eye-opener that
> helped me know that anything that I was going to do was going to
> be opposed. And that I had to keep forging ahead. Until he said
> "Your husband doesn't encourage you, isn't he just behind you and
> just rah rahing you to make…" so that was an eye-opener. And the
> other eye-opener up there was when the instructor gave us a sheet on
> being accountable or being a victim. And I looked at the cycle of a
> victim, and I never thought I was a victim because I'm a pretty
> positive person. But I just looked at how I hadn't been up-front with
> my husband about how he is very verbally abusive. And I was just
> taken. And you just don't know, and I was just taken, and I decided I
> just can't take this anymore, he is going to know how much it hurts,
> and he is going to know where I'm at and where I'm going. If he
> wants to continue this, I mean we all have choices, but at that point I
> started making pretty solid changes in my life.
> When we went through our lifetime history in class and I
> looked back at my highs and my lows, um, a lot of my highs were

doing office work. When I graduated from high school I worked in medical records, and I just had a blast. And, so, and I had gone to secretarial college, and I'm an organizer, and I like keeping busy. I'm a people person. I just like secretarial work, I had always liked it, and it's been real appealing to me. So, yes, it helped me look at that and see how that was what was that called (life line), you drew a line and drew in your highs.

I really don't know how my skills worked together. I mean I've only done my husbands book's; I've really never been tested out in the real world. Now I'm getting it, but not much, but I'm still, I need more of a challenge. The school district is really [pause] well not much of a challenge. I gave myself this year to just check out what's available. I wish the temporary agency would give me more work 'cause they probably have better avenues for businesses. I get more satisfaction from that kind of work. And that makes me happy.

The class instructor helped me prepare my resume. Oh, she just, I just blocked my mind, and she just helped me put the words in readable sentences that I could live with. I didn't want to put anything false down; I wanted to make sure that I could do what I said I could. And to me, I have a problem with resumes; it's almost like interviews. The real thing is when you are on the job first, you know? And, um, I've read resumes, and to me they are false. They are just, you can glorify yourself all you want. You can say I have a skill here because you've done it once and to me I don't have skills unless I'm there and I'm up against the wall and I'm coping. And that's to me is the test. Not putting it on paper. I had a real mental problem so she just helped me get it down, I could live with what I've put down. And know that I can stand behind it.

We talked further about some of the personal growth changes that had

happened due to the experience at the skills center.

Okay, well I've just grown so much. I think it's probably helped me access who I am and where I want to go. And in that way it gave me a real big benefit. Really big. In fact, my husband doesn't. He said I wish I could go back to the week before the class. (Why?) He wants to go back the way it was. I'm a lot happier now.

This statement was indicative of the relationship Joanne had with her

husband. His efforts to control her behavior were starting to fail as she got more

confident in her rediscovered skills. Our discussion continued about her future job

search and decision.

> No, I just don't know what I want to do. I don't know that I want to work full-time, I don't know if it's conceivable that I'll find a part-time job that I want. And that's kind of held me back. 'Cause there is some structure in my life that I don't want to let go of, and in a painful time you have to let go, and I can't see that.
>
> And over at my house because of my husband problems, he likes to run a tight ship, and he really doesn't like kids around. We have to be quiet. I have, like, my husband works evenings. He just got out of bed when I came down here. So I have, I look at my evenings being very empty. Pretty empty. I have to find something to fill those in. I work out every morning at 6:45. And that's been my biggest goal. I want to keep working out. If I work full-time I just don't know if I can fit it in. So I don't want to give that up, 'cause I'm over 200 pounds, and I'm afraid of what I'd be if I didn't work out. And then I take care of his books, and I take care of inventory in the house, and I clean, and, you know, I just don't know. It's been real hard. I think part-time would suit me more.

She hit bottom in her self-esteem about one year before entering the

program. She did find some help from the college in their women's life skills

classes. From there she was referred to the skills center program. Joanne was able

to lift herself out of feeling suicidal to being able to work for the local school

district as a temporary worker. She was feeling better about herself and was

concerned about her continued well-being. She talked about working out and

watching her weight. She liked what she was doing and was ready for a new

challenge. Her self-confidence in her ability to do more was evident in the way she

spoke about the success she experienced in her new job.

Joanne was testing the market for job satisfaction. She realized her skills

and abilities were stronger than she had estimated, and was gaining more

confidence in her ability to take on more challenges.

Career decision

Joanne seemed to have the skills to make a good career decision. She had

worked hard on developing her resume and practicing her interview skills. Her

temporary job with the school district was providing some valuable experience. We

discussed some of the benefits that she got out of the program.

> Actually I finished my resume. I had a real hard time doing a
> resume. It was very difficult for me, and I had to eventually go back
> to the instructor and say you need to do this for me because my
> brain wasn't working clearly, and she really helped me get some
> things down on the resume. And once I had that resume done, I went
> to the school district and applied there, and I went to a local employ-
> ment agency and put my resume in there. I'm working part-time as a
> substitute for the school district in the classified section, not the
> certified. And that's real fun.
> [Before the skills center] I had been pretty much self-
> employed during all my childhood life. My children's childhood. I
> ran a daycare while they were young 'cause I believe in staying
> home with my children. And then after that I got into personal care
> products selling. And I did real well on that, but I got really bored
> after about 12 years.

We talked about how she made decisions and some of the events in her life

that affected those decisions. The skills center program focused on career decision-

making, and she discussed different models that were effective.

> I just tried to think about what avenue could give me the
> most experience, and I thought of a temporary job. With the school
> district I knew I liked their schedule, and my kids schedules would

fit. And, they always seemed like a supportive, nurturing group of
people in the school system. And I haven't been let down. They are
real, I found, very nice and very supportive. They help you under-
stand what you need to have done.

[Do you have a decision making style that you prefer?] I
don't know. Jump in with both feet and swim. [Laugh] Yeah, but I
think getting that on the job, getting out into the work force helped
me clarify more of my skills. I really was uncertain at the end of the
class, and that's probably why I had a hard time with my resume. I
knew I had skills, but I never tested them out in the public sense,
and I wasn't willing to give myself a pat on the back until I had gone
out in the workforce and measured myself up against what I was up
against.

An important part of the skills center program was the exploration of

careers with the computer software. Joanne talked about the confusion that still

bothers her about making a decision for job search. She had the tools and interest,

but was not sure quite how to put all of these new skills together. Several

occupations were presented to her, and she was not sure about them.

Oh yes, different things came up. I just can't fit into those
niches. What I want to do with my life and what I don't want to give
up. I figure I'm going to give myself time. I've learned patience. I
mean, I was ready to kill myself two years ago, and I couldn't care
less about anybody or anything, and I knew it would take me time. It
took me time to get into that hole, and it's going to take me some
time to get out. And right now we're not paying the medical
insurance, and I am going to do what I can do to find out about what
kind of benefits I could get. I probably need to seek more informa-
tion, and I never did utilize that part of the program and learn more
about other occupations.

It seemed Joanne's primary interest in working was to help out financially

and find some personal satisfaction. The family seemed to be financially secure,

but being self-employed, the cost of health insurance had become an issue. Joanne

wanted to work to get out of the house, cover some of their expenses, and to find

some personal growth in the workplace. She needed to spend additional time working on her skills and interests and decide about the possibility of returning to formal education of some sort to make her skills more marketable.

Joanne was in a place in her life where she was ready to utilize her skills and abilities and move into the workforce. She remembered experiences when she was younger, and realized how satisfying office work had been to her. She would like to recapture that success and move out of the homemaking environment. Joanne was making an emotional decision based on her home situation and her earlier memories of a good working experience (Arroba, 1977).

Career implementation

We talked about work and jobs and how to go about the next step. She was still so unsure that she changed her mind again and again. She did want to work. She knew that getting out into the workplace would be of value to her, but could not seem to take the next step to action. When we talked about what kind of job she would like, her answers were vague and not specific. I never heard her describe any other kind of occupation other than office work.

> Well I have to like it. I think just by doing this temporary work that I'm doing and, um, getting out there and doing something. I don't know, I have to find out what it's going to take. I know my intention is to get medical insurance, and then I have to look for jobs that would offer that on a part-time basis. It's going to be tough for me I think. 'Cause I need to keep moving. I like to solve problems; um, I haven't really discovered how I can work that strength in, what kind of job that could parlay into that. I've been answering the phones and doing some typing, but that's not enough. I need more. I

like to find solutions. That excites me. And I don't know how to find
a job with that kind of kick to it.
    I like a challenge. And that's why being with the school
district and every day is a new day. I get into different situations. I
just wish I had more of a clear career. [Laugh]

Vocational maturity

After Joanne completed the skills center program, she set out to learn as

much as possible to be successful in office work. She registered as a temporary

worker with the local school district and also with a temporary employment firm.

Her "temp" jobs had mostly been with the school district, and she had worked in a

variety of secretarial positions. She was interested in the variety, but not for the

long term. She would like to continue gaining work experience and then move into

a more permanent position.

She continued throughout our interview to switch between part-time and

full-time interest. When she spoke about her family situation, she wanted full-time

work to be out of the house. Then she talked about her youngest child and

mentioned part-time work might be better. She still had some issues to work out

before she made her final decision on a long-term career choice. She was still

vocationally immature according to Super (1953) and Osipow and Fitzgerald

(1996), as her plans are not yet clear.

JUDY

Judy was 57 years old, separated, and had recently moved to the area to be near her husband so they could try to work out their differences. Her daughter and one of her sons were married. Another son was in high school and lived with her. She had a bachelor's degree in English and taught school before they started their family.

> So, anyway my husband and I separated two years ago, sadly, and he got into some things that were very difficult for me. We are doing a lot better now that I've moved up here, but he left us and moved here in September of 1997. My father had died in August and my husband left in September, and I went back home in November of that year and cleaned out my parent's house. And in January my husband filed to go bankrupt. My counselor said not to move up there, but to remain separated, but not divorced and don't move up here, but ultimately I did because I felt and he felt that if we were to get back together, we'd need to live in the same place. And we felt our son would need his father transitioning from boy-hood to manhood during these years. So there are still a lot of things that are heartbreaking to me yet, but there are a lot of things that are working. Yeah, for a lot of years we were working toward the separation, since 1988; you know no one is more shocked than me that this happened to us.

Background

Judy taught school for a while and then stayed home with her children. She did not work during the time her children were young, but at the time of her separation she was forced to find work.

> I'd really like to be a stay-at-home mom, but everyone seems to think I need to work. And I did enjoy working, but I think if they'll let me I'd like to work more part-time so I can be at home with my son. I just think he needs more attention. But everyone

thinks it would be good for me. I mean I did enjoy it. I think a lot of what I need is confidence building. I don't have a lot of confidence in myself. I think I would like to have just a part-time job. I think it would be healthy for me. It has been very difficult for me the past two years, and it would give me something to help build my confidence and get my mind on something else and also a chance to meet other people. And so that is how my decision-making is moving toward that direction.

Vocational self-concept

Judy talked about her reasons for getting into the skills center program. She was fairly new to the community at the time and was interested in getting out and meeting people.

But anyway when I came up here [to this new community], I had three different people, that don't know each other, tell me to go to the same church. They all knew about this church. So I said "All right." I have to do something. I can't just sit home and be depressed. So I started attending the church, and I started making a few friends, and I loved that.

And then I saw an article in the local paper, which is our once a week newspaper, advertising this class at the community college for beginning computer skills and career development, and it was, I think, it was a five weeks course. I just went to find out about it, and they already signed me up. I got home, and I felt, I don't know, I felt really insecure about it and even talked to a staff member of the skills center and I told her I wasn't going to come. And then a few days later I called her and told her I changed my mind and wondered if there was still a place. And she said, yes. It was amazing to me because they had about 40 applicants there. I felt relieved. I really needed this class. I was just overwhelmed. I started the end of September; I went through the end of September through October. I cried [in the class]. Several of us did, cried at the beginning. I was just overwhelmed.

So anyway, I got into this class, and I was encouraged that I knew something about the computer. The instructor of the program was one of the best teachers I have ever had. I like her very much. She is an encourager, she is so well informed, she is so warm, and I

like the way she conducted her classes with a lot of interaction among the students. I felt that I learned so much.

We talked about computer experience and what Judy felt she was lacking. She had expected that she would be learning more about the computer than she did. From my observation she already knew the basics about word processing but didn't appreciate how much she knew. She was more concerned about what she did not know.

> I did have two disappointments in the class. One is that I felt that I wasn't prepared as much as I should have been on the computer. The course was advertised as beginning computer skills and that was exactly what they did. It was excellent that way. But I needed more, and I felt like I wasn't really ready. This wasn't their fault; I didn't have enough confidence at that point to go into the job market when I got out of the class. I was scared about my lack of computer skills. I never want to go into a job that I don't know anything. It's just too stressful for me.

Part of the training in the skills center program was to help recognize values, skills, and interests. Judy spent a great deal of time on this area, as it was the critical input into the CIS program. Her CIS results gave her some insight into potential career options that she continued to examine.

Since she had been out of the workforce for a while, some of the class activities were very new to her. She learned more about business, interviews and job search strategies, and more about the world of work.

> They did give us a lot of job search strategies in class, and, um, one of things that we did that was the most helpful. The instructor gave us a list of the 10 or 12 most commonly asked questions in an interview. And we really had to think through and write down our answers. Of course we changed them as we practiced in class back and forth, and then we had to memorize

them. I think that was so powerful. Because she said they don't want to know my very personal things, they want to know what do you do or what can you do that would benefit our company.

This activity was helpful to Judy to help reintroduce her to the working world. Her comments were insightful, as she was learning more about herself and how she fit in the workplace.

Yes. I think another thing that we learned that was good was we learned resources. That we are not out here alone, and this is where you can go and look for resources that can help you. Oh, one of the things that I was really amazed at was about the job market. And the class instructor really went into a lot of detail about that. About how businesses think today. Well I'm not a business woman, I haven't been in business, I didn't have a clue, and one of the big things she taught us was that companies no longer want to be responsible for their employees. When you went to work for Kodak, they were your family, and you were in their family, and we're going to take care of you for life. You're really important to us. She said people today typically change jobs every seven years. And you are responsible for your career. That was a shock to me. I just thought it is vital to really know what's out there and how people are thinking and what you have to do to get into the loop, and how to approach it. I had no knowledge about that, none, I didn't have a clue. But I'm kind of nervous. My greatest fear is that I'll get fired.

Judy's lack of confidence shows in the statement about being afraid of getting fired. She was neither working at the time nor had she started her job search, but she was concerned about losing a job.

And another thing that worked to my benefit, that I didn't know, was she said employers prefer to hire older people, because they get young kids up here and they get all this training and they think, why am I doing this in my community for $7 per hour when I can go to Portland and make $10 doing the same thing. So off they go, after employers have put in all that training. And older people aren't usually going to do that. People who want to get back into the work environment are more likely to stay.

Our discussion continued as she explained more about the class and what she was learning about job search. The class spent several hours on interviewing and some of the techniques that people could use to help them through this process. She talked about how much of this information was new to her and how interested she was in the learning process.

> Oh yes, oh yes. I think that there are things out there that interest me. I didn't even know where to start. You know I love needlework. When we were looking at ads in the paper to find places to do information interviews, oh, I loved the information interviews. A man in the class gave me an ad for someone to do cross stitch needlework. So I called them, but it was fun and interesting to learn. It showed me that there are things out there that I am interested in and things that I can do that I didn't even know I was interested in.

She discussed some of the options that came up during the initial CIS searches for potential careers. The computer revealed some occupations that Judy was interested in during the time she was in college, but had never pursued.

> The other thing I found that I am really interested in is interior design. I love architecture. I found I couldn't do it when I was in college, because I couldn't do the math. I didn't even know there was such a thing as interior design. And I did the design for the remodel of our house. I've always been good at figuring out how to get usable space out of other space. I love doing that kind of thing. For training it would require me to move, but I'm not ready for that. So it's wonderful that I have another option that I can do while I live up here.
>
> The instructors were so encouraging. They never put you down, they just want to help you, and I was never discouraged by them.

As Judy moved through the skills center program, and continued being tutored in the computer center, and learning more about job search, her self-esteem

seemed to get stronger, but she was still nervous about her skills and abilities. During one of the follow-up calls, about six months after the interview, she mentioned she was attending a self-directed course on the computer and was preparing to job search again.

Career decision

Our discussion continued, and Judy talked more about the primary informa-tion she received from her time with the CIS computer program. She put a lot of effort into this program.

> But it was interesting, one of the interesting things we did, was we had to determine, we had a written paper that we had to determine what our interests were in an office atmosphere. We had to do the Myers-Briggs [a personality inventory], and we did all that kind of stuff to kind of evaluate what might suit us careerwise. It was really interesting. Then we had to do this with the computer. Mine came out writers and editors. And I had nothing to say. I couldn't write a book, so the next day I reorganized some of the things on my paper. I redid some of the questions and put it in the computer again. Then it came out writers and editors. So the next week, we had some free computer time again, and so I thought, you know, I'm really going to make some time and really concentrate on this. I want to move some things around that I was iffy on before, and I got it so it was the best I could do. Then the computer came out writers and editors for number one.
> About this time, it was about the end of the course, I signed up for a home fellowship group at my church. And my husband agreed to go, too. So I just signed up at church, and they assigned me to a group, and this man called me about the group. And so we went, and it turned out he was the publisher of a new publishing company in the area that was just starting up. So the class ended the very end of October, and on November 1 the publisher asked me when my class would be done. And I said it just finished the end of last week. He said, "Well I need a copy editor; will you come and work for me?" I said, "I don't know and don't know what a copy

editor does." He replied, "Well I'm also hiring a production manager, and he knows nothing about production. But I know you can do it." So I went back to the skills center instructor then with glazed eyes and said I have a job. You know I don't know what to do. She said, "I told you to be careful for what you wished for." So that was a pretty positive experience. And in March a major deal fell through. At that point I could see the handwriting on the wall. I knew my job would be over. No money coming in, and we'd lost our potential to sell. And it takes about a year to get a book to the market. So by the end of May I was let go. It was hard for me. No one has ever encouraged me before, just discouraged me. I was scared about my lack of computer skills. I never want to go into a job again that I don't know anything. It's just too stressful for me.

After the work Judy put into this position, it was a setback for her to lose it. When we talked about the loss, it was clear that she blamed herself and her lack of computer experience for losing the job. She personalized the loss even though the company folded. When we spoke about the position and the duties she had as a copy editor, it seemed to me that her computer skills were close to adequate for what she needed to do. Her lack of self-confidence seemed to have clouded her perspective of that position.

We continued our discussion and she talked about decision-making and how she moved toward considering employment and how to make the choice.

Decision-making is very hard for me. I think I would like to have just a part-time job. I think it would be healthy for me. It has been very difficult for me the past two years, and it would give me something to help build my confidence and gets my mind on something else and also a chance to meet other people. And so that is how my decision-making is moving toward that direction.

Judy seems to be an emotional decision maker (Arroba, 1977). She decided on a position without getting all the necessary information for her success. When the position did not work, she blamed herself for her lack of skills to succeed.

Career implementation

Judy followed the suggestions from the CIS computer and had spent several hours researching copy editor types of occupations. It was a big surprise to her when such a job appeared and she had the opportunity to try it out. After being let go from the publishing company, she talked to other copy editors she had met during her brief employment. They encouraged her to try for other positions or to look for work in the field on contract and be self-employed. She wanted to find a copy editor position where the work was done by hand, not the computer. Using a computer was a giant barrier for her.

> At the end of July she (the skills center instructor) called me to ask me about the job and how I was doing. I told her I had lost my job. And she said, "Well I want you to come in and see me." And I went in to see her. And by the time I got out of there she had signed me up for another 13 weeks of computer training, and so they worked it so I could go until the end of November for free. This happened two weeks before the school quarter, they were going to close until September.

Judy went back to school and was working on her computer skills again. She found another opportunity at a publishing company needing a copy editor but she decided not to apply. She was still concerned that her lack of computer skills would fail her again.

Vocational maturity

> I think the most fun thing we did in our class was that we
> had to write a list of short- and long-term goals. Which is something
> I had not done. And that was very beneficial. It gets you thinking,
> I'm going to go and do something. And here is how I'm going to do
> it.

Judy showed very low vocational maturity (Super, 1953; Osipow and

Fitzgerald, 1996). She would prefer not to work, but was being encouraged by

friends to do so. She was depressed about her marriage situation and was having

difficulty making decisions. She blamed her lack of computer experience on her

inability to get a job, but this appeared to serve as a scapegoat.

She had a great deal of confusion in her life at that time. Finding a suitable

job might solve her problems or it might make them worse. All of the factors that

led to career satisfaction are matching skills, values, interests, and abilities into an

occupation of choice. If her vocational self-concept is low, then her ability to make

a good choice is also low. Another occupational consideration that she did not

mention was to return to teaching. It was not clear if she investigated other kinds of

teaching in the adult education field in addition to teaching children. If she were

unable to make the decision then she would be considered vocationally immature.

If, however, her financial status is such that she could avoid working, then she

could spend more time in exploration.

CATHIE

Background

I was 53 at the time of this writing, had two grown sons, both attending

college, and was employed by a local community college as an administrator. In

my first occupation, I was co-owner of a computer software firm that employed

about 50 people. I was active in the local community, serving on several boards and

attending local chamber events. About ten years ago my husband and I were

divorced. My sons were eight and eleven at the time. My husband kept the

business, and I was "let go". I had worked full-time from the creation of the

business, with two short spans off for the birth of my two children. I found myself

not only unemployed but at a loss about what I could do for employment. My

duties in the business consisted of the office functions, such as the accounting and

personnel administration, and some customer training and support. I did not have

an accounting degree, so I was not in a position to be the accountant at another

business. I had a very hard time deciding what type of work to pursue.

Vocational self-concept

Before seeking new employment, I took a career planning class at the

college. This class taught me how to recognize my skills and abilities, reaffirmed

my values, and taught me ways to match these skills and interests with possible

occupations. At the end of the class I found teaching a strong area of interest. Since

I had earned my Bachelor's degree in education before my marriage, I began to

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explore getting back into teaching. I decided that teaching adults was of more interest to me than children, so I taught non-credit classes for the community college. This experience led me to teach for a private computer training center. I taught classes there for about four years. During that time I sought out and earned my Master's degree in vocational education, studying part-time at a university that had a summer school program.

My children were still young at the time I was working on my Master's degree, so I hired a childcare provider to stay with them while I went out of state for three consecutive summers to complete the program. I also took several correspondence and independent study classes during those years to complete the degree. It was very difficult to arrange childcare for the children, to finance all the classes and expenses, and to attend school.

After the completion of the degree, I began to teach for the college in the credit program. I taught career planning and computer classes for about six years. I continued with my education and focused my interests more and more on the adult learner.

My vocational self-concept changed over the years. I started my career teaching adults and then gradually expanded my interest into promoting adult learning and less in the teaching area. My confidence became much stronger as I got further into my education and my experience at the college.

Career decision

My career plan was formed over a series of years. I knew all along I wanted to work with adults in an educational capacity and I expanded my teaching abilities to enhance that decision. My overall goal was to be part of the community college system. I enjoy the diversity of the students and celebrating their success as they complete their classes and finally their degrees. I enjoyed teaching, but I wanted to be part of the administration and help in promoting all adults in their experience at the college. The decision was made very early in my education, but over time it merged into a clearer picture.

I used a logical decision-making style (Arroba, 1997). I had a clear idea of where I wanted to go and knew that furthering my education would be the only way to accomplish that goal. I was aware that it would take a number of years to complete, but was willing to work towards the goal.

Career implementation

After I completed the career planning class I studied a number of occupations. One of the results from the computer search was the identification of "real estate sales agent." I went as far into that occupation as to take the course and pass the state exam. I interviewed with several realtors, but when I found out more specifically the cost for me to be a realtor and the type of hours I would have to work, I discarded that idea, went back to the computer programs, and continued my search. When teaching came up, I was a little more cautious about jumping into

that occupation without more careful investigation. That is when I decided to teach a community education class first to try it out. I loved the experience. It was enjoyable and my students were very appreciative of my skills. About three years ago, I ran into a former student who had taken one of my earlier classes. She reintroduced herself to me and thanked me again for teaching her "WordPerfect," a word processing program. She had applied for a job and was hired based on her skills from my class. It was a joy to talk to her. I knew from teaching those early classes that this was the right direction for me to take.

I decided and implemented my career shortly after leaving the career planning class. I applied for graduate school and earned my degree while developing my teaching skills. The decision was based on the results of the career planning class skills, where I learned about how to search for occupations that matched my interests.

Vocational maturity

It took several years to finally get the position that I wanted. I was part-time faculty for many years and had applied for nearly every opening the college had for an administrative position. I applied for the director of a college center but did not get the appointment. When another similar position opened the following year I applied again. I was interviewed by one of the same people, and she was responsible for all of the college center directors. I was hired that time. I worked hard on preparing for the interview and practiced for hours. I was much better

prepared and apparently made a good impression on the interview team. I've been on the job with this position for about one year, and it's a very good fit for me.

My vocational maturity was demonstrated by the determination I had to continue to apply for positions of interest at the college. I used several techniques such as serving on committees, attending college functions and meetings as ways for people to know me better. I was very determined to be successful in my job search.

SUMMARY

The process that each of the women went through ended in different ways. Depending on personal circumstances, they made decisions that they perceived would meet their needs. Each was able to learn new skills, discover some of their personal attributes, and participate in a group learning experience. The stories they told represent the results of the steps toward vocational maturity.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

According to Merriam (1998), a "qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build abstractions across cases" (p. 195). Even as early as the second case, I tried to make sense of the experiences of all of the women as a group. Although details differed among them, as expected, patterns of experiences seemed to typify them.

EMPLOYMENT OVERVIEW

All of the women interviewed in this study, except Judy, appreciated the need to work to subsist. They were all looking for a position that would satisfy them both socially and economically. While several of the participants had finished raising their families, the need for financial security had not changed. Their moving into the skills center was a type of transition. Those transitions seemed connected to personal problems, and many directly related to financial difficulties.

Career patterns as described by Super (1957b) are "...the sequence of changes of occupations in the life of an individual" (p. 70). Super looked at an individual as moving in an orderly progression through his or her career. As observed through the series of interviews, the participants did not all have a specific pattern that was a progression recognized by Super's theory. The women interviewed struggled with multiple activities that were unrelated to each other. There did not seem to be any kind of order to their progression. They moved in and

out of occupations, stayed out of the workforce, and then returned at a later date to start something different. A few did progress in positions for several years but most did not. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) reviewed Super's career patterns and concluded that Super's insight in defining the role women play in their family will shape their lives is still important in understanding women's career development. However, neither had done further research on how women might transition away from a current pattern and how successful they might be with that change.

Super's theory indicated that people choose their "occupations," and all of their working lives are directed within that career. A person chooses occupations or jobs but not a career, since a career describes a lifetime of work experiences. Super's patterns indicated that a person would stay in one pattern for their entire career. Only Jill fit into a recognizable pattern. She shifted occupations but remained in the area of sales and marketing as she developed more skills for a different industry. The other women did not. Most of Super's studies focused on career patterns of younger people. The women studied in this research were all in their 40s and 50s and were just beginning to make more vocationally mature decisions about occupations. Terri will probably move into stable employment when she finishes her training and begins to work. She planned on being the head of household and would provide the family's primary income.

Alice worked in various positions as well as staying home with her children before her training at the skills center. She later had a steady position with good prospects; her children were grown and gone, and she was dependent on her own

income. She had expressed an interest to grow with the company, but outside influences (depending on her husband) may change that aspiration. She had some big decisions to make, especially since she seemed happy with her work and could see some potential.

Bonnie had worked steadily before her retirement. However, as long as she had the responsibility for her granddaughter she planned to continue to work. If she passed the real estate test, she could move into a stable position. If she did not pass, she might try a variety of different positions until she makes her final decision on a career direction. She could possibly work another ten years before her second retirement.

Patricia had been an unstable worker until the skills center program. The college degree and licensing that she wanted could put her in a stable position. By then she should have learned more about her abilities and skills and should be more prepared for steady work. If the college program does not work out for her, she may continue in her unstable pattern, working odd jobs during most of the year and farming in the summer. She has many working years to go.

Joanne had been an unstable worker most of her adult life. She seemed self-restricted to different types of work that she could do at home. Since the completion of the skills center program, she was looking to expand her working life. As she explored more and worked a variety of places in her temporary jobs, she may decide on a more permanent type of career focus. Until then she remains in the unstable pattern.

Judy was mixed in her employment history. She had the experience of a professional career when she was younger (teaching) and then was a "stay-at-home mom" until the time of her separation. Her last child was in high school; she was separated from her husband, and she was living in a new community. She had to move into the work place partly for financial reasons. She spoke of depression because of the problems with her family and wanting to stay at home.

Judy was reluctant about working but was forced by circumstances to return to the workplace. Judy's preference would be to not work at all, but she was feeling pressure from her family and friends to work. She talked about her lack of computer skills as a barrier to finding a job, but she had seemingly adequate computer skills and could probably get along very well with those skills now. Although the skills center training revealed several possible occupations, Judy hung onto the copy and editing occupation even though she was not skilled at it. Her lack of confidence seemed to be holding her back. She might not be successful until she resolves her difficulty at home. Her perceived lack of skills, her low confidence, and her admitted depression might prevent her from progressing. She might use her lack of computer skills as a reason not to work for a while. Until she moves beyond exploration and finds a place for her skills, she may not be able to make a vocationally mature decision.

This background provided the description of the participants' working lives. The women generally experienced very unstable career patterns. They were mostly stay-at-home-moms who for various reasons were no longer able to stay home but

needed to re-enter the workplace. Examination of their prior working patterns described where the women were in the past. Super's (1957b) theory proposed that a career pattern started when people were young and maintained throughout the lifespan. As the women in this study developed additional skills and examined their vocational self-concepts, they could understand that the pattern of the past did not have to be the pattern of the future. It could open new opportunities for growth and change.

VOCATIONAL SELF-CONCEPT

Because of the training at the skills center, all the participants had some basic understanding of their skills and interests. Even Judy was able to identify areas such as needlework and interior design that were of interest to her. She did not follow through on either of those occupations but focused more on copy and editing, even though she had very little knowledge of the field. The other participants examined more of the options presented to them on the computer and explored several.

Crystallizing of vocational self-concept was recognized by the skills center as an important part of its participants' transition back into the work force or onto different occupations. Through the activities planned in the class, the CIS computers, and the high energy of the instructors, all the participants had a positive experience in this area. They all knew more about their skills, could define them clearly, and recognized the changes they made because of this training. This

awareness varied among the participants in the study. Some of the women were very aware of their skills and were moving into occupations of interest. Others were still not as sure and were struggling with these tasks. Time was an issue, in that the work of developing their vocational self-concept was not finished. The program's fixed timeframe was a problem for some women, as they might have benefited from more time and additional learning experiences. In Patricia's case had she spent more time in a real estate office actually shadowing an agent, she might have formed a more realistic view of the duties. When time ran out, she made a career decision based on limited information and moved ahead.

Bonnie was another person who could have benefited by additional time in her development of vocational self-concept. She was determined to work in personal or public relations, but did not have sufficient formal education or experience in the field. Had she broadened her exploration of occupations, she might have discovered others that were of interest and possibly more realistic for her to achieve.

The development of vocational self-concept is one of the key components to making career decisions. As the women in the study indicated, they learned a great deal about themselves during the training. In my experience in teaching career planning to students and helping them learn to appreciate their skills and interests, I found that many times they were amazed they had so many. The women in this study reflected this; they seemed to have learned more about their abilities and had confidence in what they were able to do.

CAREER DECISIONS

Patricia could have gone back to the real estate school and finished the course within a period of several months. She was willing to wait for additional opportunities by getting her associate degree from the community college before the real estate license. Part of career decision-making is making the connection, and compromise might be a part of the process. Joanne was willing to take temporary work to find something more of interest before making a final decision. Jill will wait for the opportunity to move into sales and marketing to satisfy her occupational choice. This was also evident in Alice's choice to work as a receptionist in hopes of moving into bookkeeping.

Part of decision-making is the implementation of a person's vocational self-concept. When a person learns about vocational choices and is able to follow a pattern of deciding, they can use a particular style to make their decision. The interviewer addressed decision-making styles and participants were asked how they made their career decision. There were many styles available for career decision-making, and the skills center covered several to help their students. According to Arroba (1977) the six common decision-making styles are: logical, no thought, hesitant, emotional, compliant, and intuitive. The focus of the student's training was to help plan and implement career decisions so they could move forward after finishing the class. The more successful decisions made from this study were ones made using a logical style.

Terri was a good example of logical decision-making. She outlined her options and chose an occupation that fit best. It was clearly a logical choice based on factual information (Arroba, 1977). Her primary justification in choosing the medical transcription occupation was that she liked to type. She learned typing in high school and remembered enjoying it. She had no office or typing opportunities before her entry into the skills center. Her logical, carefully planned decision was based on facts. Her feelings about the occupation were not as clear. She had no background in business and had no plans to take any business courses. She had no experience in being self-employed, and no classes for starting a business were planned. She was, however, employed in a college office in a work-study job and was gaining some experience there. Terri's expectation was that she would finish the course and start a business that would support her family.

Alice made her decision based on logical use of information. She thought that being a receptionist in an office would provide her with opportunities to grow into bookkeeping. Because of her need to be employed, developing her bookkeeping skills through additional training was not immediately possible. She was using the position for professional growth. She used her prior experience in caregiving to get started and she was hopeful that it would lead to a long-term position within her current organization.

Jill was also a logical decision-maker. Even though her choices were restricted by the rules of the employment department, Jill evaluated the job,

decided it would meet her goals, and worked hard at being the successful candidate for the position.

Bonnie had so many choices and interests that she was having difficulty narrowing her options so she could decide. She struggled in multiple part-time occupations that made little use of her skills and interests. She was not sure what to do. If she passed her real estate test and continued to work for a real estate sales-person then she should be in an occupation that suited her. If she did not pass the test, then she would be back on the search again. She was an emotional decision-maker, as she said, "It needs to feel right."

Patricia's decision seemed very logical. However, based on her past work cycle, it seemed somewhat unlikely that she would last long enough in school to complete the degree and get her real estate license. She would need to seriously address her anger and her control issues before she moved into a position that would require extended work with the public. It would be difficult for her to be successful in the field if she were insulting to her customers. Based on her conversation she seemed to have chosen real estate sales as an occupation because of some of her father's business transactions. It was not clear if the decision was important to her personally or if she was trying to please her father.

Joanne's decision was made from emotion. The family situation was financially adequate for her to continue to stay at home. Her family problems had driven her to seek outside resources that might provide her with opportunities for change. Her decision to work was based on an emotional need to get into the

workforce and make some changes to her lifestyle. But her logical and practical plan to gain experience through temporary work might provide the assistance she needed to make a long-term decision. She remembered some good experiences in her working life that involved being in an office. She planned enough time – one year – to explore and then move into something more permanent. She gave the impression that if she found something of interest that met her needs, she would work full time. If not, it appeared that she would continue to look and work either part-time or in temporary work. She wanted to re-experience the work she enjoyed when she was younger. She needed more time to further enhance her vocational self-concept.

Judy was a hesitant decision-maker. She had low vocational self-concept, and was not ready to make a decision. Judy had some self-confidence issues to resolve before the final decision to move on could be made. She did not seem to have a clear vocational self-concept, so decision-making was not something she could do. She could benefit from other kinds of activities, such as volunteer work or further career counseling, to help build her vocational confidence.

Each decision created a different situation for the participants. They either moved forward into possible occupations or continued to search for the right type of work. Some of the women did not have enough time to make their decisions using the resources of the program to help them. They continued to struggle to make vocationally mature choices.

In Arroba's (1977) description of decision making styles, she refers to a logical style as one that coldly and objectively appraises the situation. Then the choice is made on what one considers the best alternative. One item that might be missing is the emphasis on enough information to make good decisions. Even though some of the women in this study used a particular decision making style, they may not have had an adequate amount of information from which to chose.

Making decisions is a learned skill that requires adequate information and careful planning. It is important to provide as many choices as possible so decision-making is not done just to finish a class assignment, but for meaningful life changes.

CAREER IMPLEMENTATION

Most of the participants moved into some type of occupation or training program at the completion of the program. As the women indicated in the interviews, most seemed satisfied with their progress, with the exception of Judy. They seemed hopeful that choices would be economically beneficial.

Terri, Alice, and Jill implemented their occupational choices at the completion of the program. Through various methods they all got started into different occupations at potentially higher incomes and more secure positions. Terri planned a home business and Jill planned to move into sales and marketing. Alice had an idea of moving into bookkeeping but currently lacked the skills necessary for success. The management of the company, as well as her desire to change

positions within the organization, will determine her upward growth within the organization.

Patricia made a decision to move into real estate sales based on the example of the work her father had done. She had that objective in mind when she entered the skills center program and directed her career search activities to justify it. Her employment record was unstable, and to finish a two-year college program would take a great deal of motivation. It was not clear from her interview if she had that high a level of motivation and interest to complete the task.

Bonnie was working at occupations not entirely suitable for her. She had studied her skills and interests and had a good idea of an occupational family she would like to move into. She needed some time to fully implement her plans.

Joanne wanted to be in an office environment using her secretarial skills. She remembered a good experience after high school working in an office and seemed to want to recreate it. She continued to explore various temporary jobs while she gained work experience.

Judy did go to work at the end of the skills center program in an occupation she chose as a result of her search on the CIS computer. She worked for about six months until the company folded, then she was laid off. She returned to the skills center to work on her computer skills and rethink occupations.

When each of the participants in the study began to implement their career decisions, they moved away from the skills center and worked alone. Other than Bonnie, they left behind the support of the staff and other students to move forward

with the results of their training program. I thought more of the participants would network with others from the skills center, as I found that maintaining ties with the program, other students, and with people I knew in the community, and then establishing new linkages, was most helpful for me. Looking back, however, I was not told about nor encouraged to network while in that type of training. One of the services these women may have found useful would be using networking for finding additional resources that could provide assistance or support during the job search.

VOCATIONAL MATURITY

Vocational maturity is how well career decisions were made. It is also the maturity of the choice based on actual facts. Maturity was developed over time when the participants took the time to learn more about themselves. Research by Super (1953) and later Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) seemed to suggest that vocational maturity would take place at a young age. The women from this study were developing their vocational maturity much later in life. These participants did not fit into those theories. They were vocationally immature in their twenties. They did not achieve the definition of maturity until some were in their forties or fifties. The set timeframe was not relevant for women who changed or entered stable employment later in life.

Stage theory as described by both Super (1990) and Erikson (1968) mentioned that people experience specific activities at the same time during their

life span. These theories apply fairly well to children, but do not apply as well for adults, especially the women in this study, who deviated from the expected norm to return to the workplace in a different way. The stage theory concept does not work well for people in different kinds of transitions such as divorce, death or injured spouse, or economic downturn in the family, since they might be experiencing the tasks of a young adult instead of the tasks expected from them at their older age. These differences in development may require some additional counseling interventions as well as additional time for career development.

Overall, the level of vocational maturity varied from person to person. Terri seemed quite vocationally immature before the program, except for the time she worked in the restaurant. She worked at home, convenience stores, tried telemarketing, restaurant work, and finally manufacturing. She never had the chance to settle into an occupational pattern that was of interest rather than only one being available to her. Because of a work-related injury, Terri took the opportunity to examine her options. She attended the program to expand her skills and to look for something new to do with her life. She carefully analyzed her options and chose a position that was specific to her needs. This was not a position in which she had any prior experience, nor was it one she knew a great deal about. She saw the opportunity to create a home-based business that would allow her to take care of her injury, work a schedule that was healthy for her, and would provide financial security for her family. She seemed to be very mature in this transition. She showed strong motivation and determination. She was aware of changing technology and understood that

her field may change rapidly in the future. She was already planning the next step. Her training program was short, so she could be in business within a year.

Alice had a variety of skills from the different kinds of positions she had held. She improved her basic reading and mathematics skills during the skills center program and discovered a real interest in the latter. She would have liked to pursue some bookkeeping training but needed to re-enter the workforce immediately for financial reasons. Based on her prior work, she decided that a receptionist job would be the employment she would seek. Using a recommendation from a friend, she applied and got a job as a receptionist in a business that provided services for the elderly.

Alice wanted to be the "smiley face" in the business, but her stronger interest was in bookkeeping. She let her boss know about her interests, and she was able to do a few tasks for the current bookkeeper. Alice had the hope that she would be able to learn the skills to move into that job when the current employee retired. Alice was willing to take some classes on bookkeeping, but was unable to attend school for longer periods as long as her job was full-time. She seemed to be vocationally mature because she made a clear decision based on her expectation of future work. She was willing to wait for the opportunity.

Jill was the most vocationally mature in the study. She transitioned from retail sales to manufacturing marketing and sales based on a very carefully thought-out plan. She was strongly motivated to make a change in her life and took the opportunity of being temporarily unemployed to make the change. She examined

her skills and interests using the CIS computer and paid close attention to the results. She practiced her interviewing and had some carefully planned strategies on how to handle interviews and what types of questions to be prepared for. She had, in her opinion, created an excellent resume.

Vocational maturity is reflected in behavior (Super, 1953), and Jill's behavior seemed to be very mature. She interviewed well for the job and was able to convince the company to hire her. She was the front desk person at a manufacturing plant and was the first contact for their customers. She had a strong interest in sales and marketing, which reflected her retail background, and was working on the opportunity to move into the marketing department. She was learning as much about the company as she could and was continually increasing her skills. She had a long-term interest in the company and could see a good future for herself with them.

Bonnie was borderline on vocational maturity. She had a clear idea of her values, interests, skills, and personality traits. She had made a definite decision about the amount of training and further education she was willing to do. As her interests were in personal and/or public relations, she looked for opportunities where she could work to help others. She had worked in many different types of occupations but none yet that matched what she was looking for. If the real estate assistant job worked out, she could be on a stable working pattern that could continue until her retirement. She was concerned about passing the test; and if she did not, she would be back looking for work again. She had the decision-making

skills but did not seem to be able to find the right type of occupation that met her needs. Her vocational maturity was not established enough to make a potentially beneficial decision. As Gottfredson (1981) indicated in her study, vocational choices start at an early age. Bonnie was focused mostly on gender-specific occupations and not examining additional opportunities. Her scope was limited in the positions she was willing to examine.

Patricia was classic in her position of vocational maturity. On paper she presented a comprehensive picture of good career decision-making. She appeared to have a strong vocational self-concept, and she made a decision based on reasonably accurate information. She was in the process of implementing her decision and had set long-term goals. She seemed to have had made a satisfactory transition; however, she was vocationally immature. Her actions reflected maturity, but her conversation did not. She had a great deal of anger to work out before she would be mature enough to be successful with people. The field she had chosen required a lot of people skills for success, and Patricia needed to work on those skills.

Joanne was noted as having an unstable working pattern before the skills center program and continued that way. The program offered her the opportunity to gain a great deal of vocational self-confidence, and she had a good concept of her ability to re-enter the workforce successfully. However, she had not been able to make a clear decision about where to place her energies or how to find the occupation to match her skills. Her vocational maturity was fairly strong in her

planning for the future, and her year spent exploring different occupations could be beneficial. She did not seem to recognize the additional life skills she had learned over the years that might change her real interests (Jeynes, 1992).

The decision to work as temporary help may end up being very valuable for Joanne. If she continued to get temporary assignments and good work experience, some type of occupation that suited her might appear. It looked as though she would be satisfied with general office work and did not aspire to get further education beyond that. If she makes a successful transition to a job that suits her, she would probably move into stable employment.

Judy was an interrupted worker. She was the only participant in the study with a college degree and she taught elementary school for a while before starting her family. The separation and move caused her to decide to enter the skills center program. Her unhappiness and depression was a barrier to making a decision that could help her progression in a career outside of her home. Her vocational maturity was still very low and could continue to be a barrier for her to find job satisfaction until she develops more vocational self-concept. Based on her conversation, she was fearful that her skills would not be adequate for employment and that she would fail.

As indicated by the various levels of vocational maturity, the fixed time-frame of the skills center program was not adequate for some of the women to finish their work toward vocational maturity. A fixed timeframe does not fit

everyone's needs. Some of the women could have benefited from more time to further develop their skills.

SUMMARY

The steps toward vocational maturity were examined in this section. As the data were progressively reflected upon, the issues of decision-making were more evident to me. The women in this study used different decision-making styles and techniques and had various levels of progress in their career choice search. As learning about how women made their career decisions was the focus of this study, it was interesting to note that they all were different. There were economic, educational, social, societal, cultural, and personal barriers that complicated their career decisions. It became more evident to me as this analysis progressed that making long-term decisions about careers is a time consuming process that cannot always take place within a limited timeframe. Some successes emerged but the development for others stopped after the skills center program ended for them.

The women in the study who used a logical decision-making style seemed to move into either an educational program or into steady employment. The other women – Judy, Bonnie, and Joanne – who were more emotional or hesitant in their decision-making style, were unable to find closure on this process. They either struggled with a variety of occupations or were unable to move forward with change. It appeared that the value of planning and goal setting was helpful in the continuation of planning at the end of a structured program.

Another aspect of the career decision was the work history of each participant. This was defined by their career pattern and what they had done in the past. As Jeynes (1992) indicated, the value of life experience was a factor that women discounted or did not mention as the way they developed additional skills. It was not mentioned as a factor in developing vocational maturity. They learned more about themselves, but the connection between interest and skills developing over the lifespan and directed toward career choice was not evident. Career patterns are an indication of past action and could be useful in developing the evidence of building toward a better choice.

CHAPTER VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUES

As the kaleidoscope moved, so did the participants in this study. They entered into a program that led them to spend time thinking about their futures. It was an interesting study to do, since it allowed my story to be told along with the stories of the seven participants in the study. We got a close up look at ourselves, and many examined their skills and interests for the first time during this particular transition. The participants were a small, convenient sample of women who were seeking to enter the workplace due to a 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; 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 employ-ment. 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 closer look at all the components that went into the final decision each woman made.

The other topic that was discussed in this research was the series of steps that led to their final outcome of a career decision. As each examined their personal

interests and skills and used some of the career decision-making choices, they implemented their choice. The final analysis was the maturity level of that choice.

Career patterns and socialization

Super's (1957b) career patterns do not sufficiently describe the seven women in the study. The patterns do not seem to account for divorce 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. In his early work, Super defined career patterns as a single lifetime process. The theory was originally based on young adults finding the occupation of choice and developing their career. The women in the 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 maturity developed as they had the opportunity to study their skills and interests and build their vocational self-concept. Terri, Alice, and Jill were able to recognize their skills and move into occupations that matched those skills and interests. They had defined what a career was to them and made plans to move forward. The other women did not.

Super's career patterns did not address women who 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 this study took some type of temporary employment at various times during the period they were conventional homemakers. Most selected positions for convenience, such as daycare providers, selling products from their homes, or housecleaning. These occupations did not appear to prepare them for future employment nor did they indicate other types of occupations they might pursue. The career pattern does not seem to account for ability to change.

After reading Gottfredson's (1981) theory about early socialization and the tendency for women to choose gender-acceptable occupations, it seemed evident that the women in this study chose gender-acceptable occupations. Career patterns became an interesting focus of my final reflections. The career choice or employment history represented a pattern of employment, which in this 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. Similar to Lincoln and Guba's theory (1985) the generalizations made were based on information collected and filtered through each woman's worldview. Those worldviews had accumulated over many years and the short timeframe of a five week class did not provide sufficient time to alter their views.

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 three out of the seven participants 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. Bonnie was especially interesting as she continued to stay in contact with the skills center to look for an occupation that suited her, as was Joanne, who chose an occupation based on a fond memory. Both of these women could have benefited from additional structured guidance. The value of the group activity and support seemed

to provide 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 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 they just did not set their goals high enough. One of the noticeable problems 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. Even Jill, whose background was in sales and marketing and had worked in management for various stores, chose a safe occupation when changing to a new position. Her interest was with the marketing department, but she will be in competition with any newly hired staff who might move into the position ahead of her. This lack of information for all the participants could provide fewer choices and fewer opportunities for satisfying work.

Joanne was seeking to recreate a work experience in an office that she had as a teen after high school, Terri chose the medical transcriptions occupation based on remembering she liked to type in high school, and Alice selected a receptionist position in a elder care business because of her experience in caregiving for an older family member. Their choices were made based on what they understood of the opportunities for them. There could have been other occupations 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. As seen 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. As noticed in Judy's case, the instructor called her back to the center and offered additional training. 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.

The second theme from this study was that of time. 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 seemed 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 (Women's Institute for a Secure Retirement, 2001) 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. 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. There are many opportunities for colleges to help women make new choices.

EPILOGUE

As I studied my own skills and interests and worked on my vocational self-concept, I developed an interest in working with adult learners. My Master's degree study provided me with the opportunity to learn to teach on a college level, and the teaching experience provided me with a closer look at learning and community colleges. It was especially gratifying to teach career planning as I re-energized my decision. My career choice became more focused in facilitating students' success in the college environment. My current position is that of a center director for a

community college in a community about 20 miles from the main campus. I am involved in all aspects of student services and interact with students of all ages.

The career decision I made evolved over time. I had a strong interest in working for the community college and worked hard to get employment. This meant part-time work, volunteer work, and actively reviewing position openings. I was known on campus by the administration and faculty. I am very satisfied with my career decision and my work in the community college setting. As my skills and experiences grow, I will continue to seek positions that offer more challenges and more opportunities to learn. I know I will always look for ways to work with students and advocate for their success. As time has gone by and I am progressing in my community college career, I hope my experience will be of benefit to others. I believe more strongly than ever that good choices involve sufficient information.

As I wrapped up this project I reflected on Mary Catherine Bateson's (1989) book, Composing a Life. Her story is about women's lives and how they are not only deeply immersed in change but how they need to reinvent themselves to adapt to those changes. Super's theory is linear and progressive and it is evident from the participants in this study that these women do not fit into his linear theory. Bateson (1989) stated that self-knowledge is empowering. It is part of our life to adapt and grow.

My understanding of women and their career decisions has grown. I know more now about the difficulty in making decisions for career readiness. There needs to be ample information available and time to explore options to allow

decisions to be made well. This study has made a difference in my view of career decisions and making choices. I hope I can continue to be an advocate for women in career re-entry. The kaleidoscope will shift again and the glass pieces will be in a different design and so will the women from this study, as people constantly change as they learn more about themselves.

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