

An Analysis of the Vocational Development
of Successful Career Women of Northeast Kentucky

Faculty Research Grant

Final Report

May 5, 1981

by

Jean Wilson

Assistant Professor

The vocational development of women has been neglected by career development theorists (Osipow, 1973). Farmer (1978) stated there exists a need for career development theories devoid of sex-role stereotyping. Super (1957) discusses seven categories in the career patterns of women. One pattern which has received a good deal of attention is his double-track career pattern which maintains homemaking as a second career. Conflicts between homemaking and career seem prevalent and career counseling programs need to address these (Farmer, 1971; Mathews and Tiedeman, 1969).

Ginzberg (1966) discussed three life-style categories for women:

(1) traditional (homemaker oriented); (2) transitional (more emphasis upon home than job); and (3) innovative (giving equal emphasis to job and home). Working women today seem to fit into these categories although it seems advisable to add a career oriented dimension. It is probable that there are women who give the highest priority to developing careers.

Zytowski (1969) describes women's vocational development patterns as (1) mild vocational; (2) moderate vocational; and (3) unusual vocational. The patterns are similar to Ginzbergs. In the mild vocational pattern, the emphasis is on the home. In the moderate vocational pattern, there is more emphasis on the occupation (but the home remains more important). In the unusual vocational, the career and home receive equal emphasis.

In most career development patterns of women, the role of homemaker is emphasized, as well as the particular needs of women attempting to succeed in careers. Women who devote at least equal energy to job and home were considered (innovative" (Ginzberg, 1966) or "unusual" (Zytowski, 1969) since they deviated from the modal life style for women which is homemaking.

Method

In the present study, an attempt was made to gather information about the

vocational development of successful career women. Twenty-five women were selected by a panel of 3 judges from a pool of nominations made by members of the community. The women completed a demographic questionnaire, the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), and the Strong-Campbell Vocational Interest Inventory. Five interviewers were trained and each met with five of the career women for structured interviews in which they:

- (1) asked ten questions about work (see Table 1 for a list of the questions).
- (2) asked about adult learning projects in which the women had engaged.

A comparison group of twenty-five teachers from the same area were identified and administered the same survey instruments the experimental group had taken. The five interviewers also met with these women and asked the same questions.

Results

The women in the group identified as successful career women had an average age of 41 years. (See Table 1 for list of occupations.) Nineteen women were married; they had an average of 1.7 children. The average level of education was three years of college.

A control group of 25 women was selected by the panel of judges from a pool of nominations made by the school superintendents. They had an average age of 41.4 years; all were employed as public school teachers. Twenty of the women were married; they had an average of 1.85 children. The average level of education was 5.2 years of college.

The questionnaire was divided into the periods of preschool, elementary school, high school and post high school. The women reported a high level of satisfaction in their childhood. They most frequently identified "mother" (N=15) as the most important person in their lives during this period. However, only 2

women listed mother as the most important person during the high school period. Six listed father, 7 listed another relative.

The women generally stated that they felt that their relationship with males during the post high school period was equal (Mean = 1.7; 1 = equal, 5 = unequal) yet did seem more confident of their equality with women. (Mean = 1.5).

On the CPI, the scores did not indicate a high level of anxiety, thus failing to support Horner's (1972) hypothesis which maintained that women fear success, which is anxiety-producing. On the Sense of Well-Being Scale they scored a mean of 35.68 (compared to 36.00 for the comparison group) and on the Self-Acceptance Scale, they obtained a score of 23.92 (compared to 21.92 for the comparison group).

On the SCII, the women scored higher on the Realistic Scale (Mean = 43.6 compared to 41.4 for control group), the Enterprising Scale (Mean = 55.88 compared to 50.44 for comparison group) and the Conventional Scale (Mean = 54.00 compared to 51.80 for comparison group). They scored slightly lower on the Investigative Scale (Mean = 45.96 compared to 46.36 for the comparison group), the Artistic Scale (Mean = 52.16 compared to 54.44 for the control group) and lower on the Social Scale (Mean = 49.16 compared to 53.84 for the comparison group). The women's score on the Introversion-Extroversion Scale indicated they are equally at ease in situations where they deal with people or working alone.

Discussion

The questionnaire results indicated a high level of satisfaction with family life as the women were growing up. They came from families of moderate size with an average of 3.4 children in the families. There did not seem to be one individual who exerted the most influence on the women throughout their growing up years. Fifteen of the women identified their mothers as the most

important person in their lives during their elementary school years. During the high school years, a variety of individuals was listed as being the most important person. In the control group, the same pattern emerged; sixteen of them identified mother as the significant person during the elementary school years, but all except two identified others as most important during the high school years.

In the control group, most of the women fit into Super's (1957) transitional pattern and Zytowski's (1969) mild vocational pattern, placing more emphasis on the home than the job. In the group of women identified as successful career women, there was evidence that they would be considered "innovative" (Ginzberg, 1966) or "unusual" (Zytowski, 1969) since their lifestyles differed from the usual - homemakers.

As one woman said, "I had to put mother number two. The business had to come first." Eleven of the career women interrupted their careers for limited periods when children were born, but 14 of them worked continuously after finishing school.

Many of the career women who were married named their husbands as the individuals who had been most supportive of them at certain career decision making periods. As a group, most of their husbands are employed in professional or managerial occupations. The husbands seem to play critical roles in both encouraging the women to be ambitious and being understanding about the role conflict between career and home demands.

Table 1

-
1. How and when did you decide upon a career?
 2. What problems arise due to your being both wife and/or mother and career woman? How do you resolve these?
 3. Were there periods during which you were not employed outside the home? What was your reason for remaining at home? Why did you return to work?
 4. What problems did you face related to your career decisions?
 5. Are there particular people who have been supportive of you at certain career decision making periods of your life? Who? How?
 6. What problems have arisen that you attributed to your being female?
 7. In reviewing your work role, what do you consider to be your strong points? Weak points?
 8. Why do you work?
 9. In what community activities do you participate?
 10. Describe your earliest recollection.
-

Table 2

Occupation	No. of Women
Attorney	4
Bank Vice-President	3
College Administrator	1
Director: Community Development	1
Director: Tri-State Fair & Regatta	1
Executive Director: YWCA	1
Jobber - Petroleum	1
Manager - Clinic	1
Mayor	1
Personnel - EEO Specialist	1
Physician	1
Project Manager	1
Publishing Company Vice-President	1
Realtor	2
Sales Manager	1
Self-employed (entrepreneurs)	2
Service Supervisor	1
Supervisor	1