WOMEN'S CAREER CHOICES AND DEVELOPMENT AT THE TRANSITION

POINT OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the career decision-making process of women at the transitional stage of university graduation. Data was collected from 21 participants involved in one of six different focus groups. There was a range of two to six participants in each group.

The themes describing the process of women's career development at the point of graduation transition included; 1. A developmental process. 2. Optimism, 3. Present-day versus historical influence of gender, and 4. The importance of values.

The developmental process of career decision-making was demonstrated through differences in past, present, and future influences such as the importance of immediate and extended family members for past influences and the consideration of current or future partners and/or children as future influences. The developmental process was also displayed through differences in decision-making in areas such as the initial selection of a Bachelor of Arts degree compared with the process of excluding past occupational goals.

Optimism was demonstrated through; a.) The perception of high self-confidence relating to participants' ability to attain career success, b.) A sense of greatly improved career choices and options compared with their mothers' options, c.) The number and breadth of career possibilities that were named across participants, d.) Using metaphors that demonstrate ideas such as freedom, optimism, opportunities, and a focus on the future, and e.) The perception that few compromises had been made in the past.

Gender influence was considered and participants noted that compared with their mothers they benefited through; a.) More opportunities and choices in comparison with mother, both in education and occupations, and b.) Changes in societies' values and

gender expectations in comparison with mother's experience. More than half of the participants thought that their gender did not influence their own career directions.

Values were shown to be a strong guiding force in the career decision-making process relating to past, present, and future factors. Of all the influences mentioned, values represented 37 percent of past factors, 57 percent of present factors, and 60 percent of future factors. Values were also an important part of participants' definitions of career success.

Five theories were considered for their applicability to the findings and to women's career development. These included Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise, Hackett and Betz' (1981) theory of self-efficacy, Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and behaviour, Valian's (1999) theory of women's advancement, and Patton and McMahon's (1999) systems framework.

Counsellors, educators, and others working with women in higher education who are making career decisions may find it encouraging to note the general sense of optimism and a broadening of the perceived structure of opportunity for women in this study. According to the results of the present study, it would be beneficial for those working with women in higher education to consider developmental factors, such as the influences of family and future partners, as well as to assist students in crystallizing their values. Areas of future research include extending the inquiry to other groups of women as well as to men to compare the similarities and differences. Future research may also utilize an adaptation of the focus group format as an intervention designed to assist graduating students clarify their career goals.

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REFLEXIVITY:

PERSONAL POSITION of the RESEARCHER

In qualitative inquiry, the tool of analysis is the researcher. Therefore, reflexivity is an essential foundational component of each step of the research process. Reflexivity involves the researchers' continual assessment of personal perceptions and experiences that may influence the research process (Aunger, 1995; Krefting, 1991). Reflexivity assists the researcher to sharpen her own awareness of personal values and how these may influence interaction with the data, and subsequently, the research findings.

In this study, reflexivity began at the very early stages, during the formulation of the topic of inquiry. I, the researcher, had completed all coursework required of the doctoral degree and was involved as an intern at a university counselling centre. My area of specialty is career and higher education. During my masters' thesis, I had explored the use of informational interviewing as a tool to assist Bachelor of Arts students, both men and women, in their career development at the point of graduation transition. For my doctoral dissertation, I was planning to continue exploring the career development of graduating arts students, both men and women. However, a series of events took place that caused me to become curious about the effects of gender on my own career decision-making process as well as that of other women.

During my internship, I supervised two male counsellor trainees who were completing a masters in counselling psychology. They had both applied to various doctoral progams and shared their decision-making process with me in the context of our supervision relationship. In observing the process of their decision-making, I began to notice differences between factors that they stressed as important considerations, and

those that had been a part of my own career decision-making. I began to wonder about the extent of gender influences operating in our decision-making systems. There were specific differences between my selection of doctoral programs and theirs in terms of their greater quantity of options considered including the willingness to re-locate as needed, and their greater attention to financial considerations compared with my own. My concern was that if these differences related to gender influences rather than individual personality factors and circumstances, these influences had operated largely outside of my own awareness in my career planning process. Valian (1999) speaks of the gender schemas that both men and women use to guide their behaviour. She also discusses the small accumulation of advantages that generally accrue over time into sizable and tangible advantages for men compared with women in their career development. Gottfredson (1981) speaks about the compromise and circumscription that take place for women in limiting occupational possibilities.

This is the context within which the present inquiry emerged, paired with the knowledge that the field of women's career development is a changing and developing field with many unanswered questions. The exercise of reflexivity required tentativeness in my personal thoughts and experiences regarding women's career decision-making. It also required that I put aside, as much as is possible, the current theories of women's career development in order to explore the thoughts and experiences of participants without the constrictions of pre-conceived judgments. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process, I have attempted to be "transparent" (Huberman and Miles, 1994). This enables the reader to closely follow the inquiry process and extrapolate the

findings to other populations or even to infer other possibilities leading to further

research inquiry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

<u>Women and Career</u>

The field of women's career development has emerged and grown over

approximately the past three decades. In considering theoretical advances in this field,

Fitzgerald, Fassinger, and Betz (1994) report, "the study of women's behavior represents

arguably the most active and vibrant area of research and theory in all vocational

psychology." (p. 67). In examining the working lives of a group of successful career

women, Konek, Kitch, and Shore (1994) conclude, "it is important to realize that

women's analysis of their place in the world of work may be in a formative stage" (p.

245).

In understanding the current state of women's career development, it is first of all

essential to consider the historical context. In 1870, most women employed outside the

home were domestic servants and by 1940, occupational choices for women included

options such as clerical, teaching, bookkeeping, sales, and nursing (Marshall & Paulin,

1987). During this time period, women were expected to give primary concern to the

needs of the family. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, there has been

enormous change for women in terms of educational and occupational choices, as well as

the general inclusion of women in the public sphere.

Women's career development differs from men's career development in various

ways. There are differences relating to occupational interests (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987;

Gati, Osipow & Givon, 1995; Redpath, 1994), career aspirations (Harmon, 1989),

earnings and status (Aitkenhead & Liff, 1991; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Statistics Canada, 1997), timing of career paths (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992), balance of work and family (Bassett, 1985; Fitzgerald, 1994; Hochschild, 1989), preferences for interconnectedness versus independence (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, & Robinson, 1997), previous workplace experience (Schwartz & Zimmerman, 1987), gender role schemas (Moen, Erickson, & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Valian, 1999), perceptions of occupational opportunity (Timpson, 1994), and occupational achievement (Eccles, 1985).

One of the primary career influences for women pertains to the historical roles of mother and homemaker (Fitzgerald, 1994). The practical impact of these roles results in many women working both in the public sphere as well as bearing much of the "second shift", including housework and childcare, that is required of the private sphere (Hochschild, 1989). The historical allegiance to these roles may also be echoed in the finding that women demonstrate greater reluctance to ask husbands to relocate for her job promotion while at the same time showing a willingness to relocate for his promotion (Bassett, 1985).

Several theories have been developed to assist in explaining the differences between the career paths of women and men. These include Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise, Hackett & Betz' (1981) theory of self-efficacy related to career choices, Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and behaviour, and more recently, Valian's (1999) theory of gender schemas and the accumulation of advantage. Additionally, Patton and McMahon (1999) have recently developed a career development theory that incorporates systems theory and provides a structure relevant to the diversity of women's career paths.

Gottfredson (1981) postulated that women's career choices were circumscribed at an early stage of development while they were still children. Hackett and Betz (1981) utilized Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy to explore women's non-traditional occupational choices. Astin (1984) reviewed the importance of motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity pertaining to women's career choices. Valian (1999) focused on both the gender schemas of individuals as well as the accumulation of advantage to explain women's slower rate of career advancement in relation to men. Patton and McMahon (1999) consider individual factors as well as the social and environmental context which together influence career choices.

Purpose of the Study

This study strove to understand the complexity of women's career choices at the point of graduation transition including consideration of the influence of gender as well as compromises made.

Daniel Levinson speaks of complexity in reference to the study of an individual's life: "To study the life course it is necessary to look at an individual's life in its complexity at a given time and to delineate its evolution over time" (Levinson, 1996, p. 4). Levinson stresses the importance of recognizing the place of each segment in the life cycle. In the present study, the segment of graduation transition is examined with the goal of unwrapping some of the complexity regarding women's career choice development and its evolution over time. Career aspirations have a history in the lives of individuals and this history can be co-constructed by a number of factors such as gender socialization, the influences of significant others, educational opportunities, and a host of other factors.

The present research explored the perceptions of women as they considered their future direction after graduation. Graduating female students generally have a vast array of career possibilities compared with their mothers and grandmothers. This study focused on the perceptions of women close to graduation regarding their choices, compromises, the role of gender, and level of confidence in their decision-making process.

Research Questions

The intent of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What is the process by which women graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree make choices regarding their career paths?

2. What compromises are made?

3. What is their perception of the effect of gender on these choices?

4. What is their level of confidence regarding the ability to achieve career goals?

Definitions

The definitions relating to career development as well as career are broad definitions as noted by Sears (1982).

Career Development: The total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one's career. (Sears, 1982)

Career: Time extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the person. (Sears, 1982)

Therefore, career is not defined narrowly as synonymous with occupation, but rather, career integrates the breadth of life roles that an adult participates in along with employment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Women's Career Development</u>

Women's careers have been studied for approximately three decades. Women's

career development differs from that of men in various ways. The most prominent

difference seems to be the influence of the historical roles of mother and homemaker

(Fitzgerald, 1994). Along with the influence of these roles comes the idea of a "stalled

revolution" where women have joined the workforce and yet they do the bulk of the

"second shift" which includes housework and childcare (Hochschild, 1989). Another

way in which women's career development differs from that of men is in the preference

of interconnectedness over independence (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, &

Robinson, 1997). Women have also shown diversity in terms of individual career paths

including a traditional linear career progression, interrupted progression, and beginning to

work at an occupation later in life (White, Cox, & Cooper, 1992). White et al. found that

professional women employed a variety of patterns in achieving career success. Larwood

& Gutek (1987) encourage researchers to incorporate the importance of timing in theories

of women's career development.

Women have also demonstrated a reluctance to relocate for career advancement

as compared with men. Seventy-three percent of women stated that they would give up

their present jobs for their husbands' job relocation while the same percentage said that

they would turn down a promotion if it meant that husbands had to give up their present

jobs (Bassett, 1985, p. 241). Chao & Malik (1988) speak about the constraints on

women's careers including family plans, organizational expectations, and sex-role

stereotyping (1988). They propose a model for women's career development that includes the consideration of factors at the individual level, the organizational level, and the societal level.

In considering women's career aspirations, Harmon (1989) has noted significant differences over the course of approximately 15 years comparing two groups of women with the second group aspiring to less traditional occupations and more occupations in science, math, and medical service than the earlier group. Harmon adds that in terms of a Holland code, the second group of women was more Realistic and less Artistic than the first group. However, although some change has taken place, gender differences in career interests continue to be demonstrated (Gati, Osipow, and Givon, 1995).

Researchers have attempted to explain the differences in women's career development compared to that of men. Three theories that emerged around the same time period are Gottfredson's theory of compromise and circumscription (1981), the ideas of Hackett and Betz (1981) relating to self-efficacy, and Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and behaviour. More recently, Valian (1999) has contributed her theory of gender differences. Additionally, Patton and McMahon (1999) propose a model of career development that encompasses the various factors relevant to women's career choices as well as being relevant to men.

Gottfredson (1981) postulated that girls circumscribe their career choices at an early age. According to this theory, when a career compromise is necessary, interest is sacrificed first, prestige is next, and sex type preferences are sacrificed last.

Hackett and Betz (1981) have focused on self-efficacy to explain women's career behaviour. Bandura's (1977) original theory of self-efficacy was noted to have relevance

to women's career decisions and to provide rationale for the fact that women tended not to pursue male dominated occupations. Betz & Hackett (1997) view expectations of self-efficacy as a "major mediator of the effects of gender role socialization on gender differences in career choice and adjustment" (p. 386). The general concept of self-efficacy has also been used to study career-related behaviour using more specific definitions of occupational self-efficacy, mathematics self-efficacy, career-decision making self-efficacy, task-specific self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1986), and job search self-efficacy (Saks & Ashforth, 1999).

Astin (1984) reviewed four areas that were of particular significance to women's career choices including motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity. Considering motivation, Astin stated that individuals are motivated to work in order to satisfy the basic needs of survival, pleasure, and contribution. Concerning expectations, she considers the differences between men and women regarding the perceptions of work options available to them. In sex-role socialization, Astin speaks about the differing messages that are communicated to boys and girls, which in turn, influence their work expectations. The structure of opportunity includes "economic conditions, the family structure, the job market, the occupational structure, and other environmental factors that are influenced by scientific discoveries, technological advances, historical events, and social/intellectual movements." (p. 125). Astin maintained that basic motivations are the same for men and women but that their socialization experiences and the structure of opportunity differ, influencing career choices.

Valian (1999) considers the gender differences regarding the slower rates of women's occupational advancement as compared with men. She states that the gender schemas of individuals and the accumulation of both disadvantages and advantages work together to create large gender differences over time.

Patton and McMahon (1999) propose a new systems theory of career development for both women and men that incorporates individual factors, as well as the social and environmental context. They discuss the idea of recursiveness and change within these structures that is complementary to Astin's (1984) ideas about changes over time in the socialization process and the structure of opportunity that in turn, change career options.

In considering the present context of women's career development, it is beneficial to briefly review the historical background of women as wage earners.

Brief History of Women as Wage Earners

Women's roles in society have changed drastically over the past century. In 1870, 9.7 percent of the female population was working for pay outside of the home. By 1940, the number of women working for pay had doubled to 19.8 percent (Marshall & Paulin, 1987, p.8). Currently, 58.1 percent of women are in the workforce and this number climbs to 78.8 percent for women ages twenty-five to forty-four (Statistics Canada, 1998).

Over the past century, when women were needed for employment due to war, shifting demographics, and economic hardships causing financial burdens on the family, women were also expected to give primary importance to the needs of the family (Marshall & Paulin, 1987). Schwartz & Zimmerman (1987) consider the mixed emotions that women experienced in entering the workplace including feelings of guilt due to

leaving the home and the sense of inadequacy due to inexperience. Women "were not supported as were men by a history, an upbringing, and a set of conventions regarding career preparation and achievement" (Schwartz & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 159). In the 1970's and 1980's, equal opportunity legislation was passed in western democracies. Research gauging the experiences of women working in the Canadian federal system reflects that equal opportunity legislation has made a negligible impact in enhancing career opportunities (Timpson, 1994).

Schwartz & Zimmerman consider the "corrosive" environment in some companies regarding women's employment (p. 158). In a 1997 Canadian study of women's advancement to senior occupational levels, women rated the top two barriers as; 1. Male stereotyping and preconceptions of women's roles and abilities, and 2. Commitment to family responsibilities (Conference board of Canada, 1997, p. 8). In a 1985 report on career success and Canadian women, eighty-four percent of the professional women polled reported that their tendency to give marriages, children, and partners first priority over their careers was a barrier to advancement (Bassett, 1985, p. 241). In a qualitative study of women managers (Marshall, 2000), three broad themes were noted to describe the experiences of women. These included the challenges of working in male-dominated environments, striving to maintain a viable sense of self, and experiencing stress and tiredness (p. 220-222). Presently, the status of women's employment continues to reflect lower rates of pay compared to men, work roles that are clustered within the lower levels of organizational hierarchies, and occupational segregation along gender lines (Aitkenhead & Liff, 1991). The average earnings for all

full-time workers in Canada for 1997 were $42,626 for men and $30,915 for women (Statistics Canada, 1997).

Thus, the historical account of women's relationship to paid work, including amount of pay, the selection of occupational options, and familiarity with a wage earner role, differs from that of men. The influence of gender role socialization is an inescapable force and a contributing factor to the present context of women's career choices.

Factors Affecting Women's Career Development

Research data continue to suggest gender differences in many areas of career development such as in gender role socialization, the selection of occupations, the influence of historical roles, role models, interdependence vs. independence, academic success, and career decision-making.

Gender Role Socialization

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) review the influence of gender socialization on career decisions: "cultural attitudes and beliefs concerning women's roles and capabilities, through the mechanisms of sex role socialization and occupational stereotyping, operate to encourage the development of sex-typed psychological characteristics and to permeate sex-typed adult roles" (p. 36). Valian (1999) speaks of the gender schemas of both men and women relating to their expectations of women's roles. She postulates that gender schemas are partially responsible for women's slower rate of advancement in professional occupations.

Nevertheless, dramatic changes have been documented in the gender role ideology and work role identity of women over a thirty-year period (Moen, Erickson, and Dempster-

McClain, 1997). Moen et al. examine the intergenerational transmission of attitudes from mothers to daughters and noted that the mothers themselves changed over the 30-year period becoming less traditional and more similar to their daughters. Moen et al. consider the influences of maternal work roles compared with maternal attitudes regarding work and conclude, "when socialization processes are effective, it seems that they operate through verbal persuasion rather than role modeling" (p. 291). According to these results, a mother's views regarding women's options in the world of work appear to be more powerful than her own work role. In a longitudinal study of changes in the career aspirations of women, Harmon (1989) notes dramatic differences in 1968 and 1983 in the participation of mothers in the labour force, mother's expectations of working and the father's attitude toward the mother's work. Harmon adds that historical influences may operate through women's families creating changes in women's career aspirations.

Eccles (1985) highlights the differences in values and interests of gifted men and women towards gender-stereotyped patterns. She adds that parents of gifted children tend to underestimate their daughters' ability and that many gifted women do not succeed occupationally to the same degree as their male counterparts.

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) state: "while the extent of a woman's labour force participation is approaching that of men, the nature of that participation continues to differ greatly from that of men, keeping working women economically disadvantaged, lower in status, and burdened with multiple role demands" (p.6).

Selection of Occupations

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) state that generally, women are continuing to choose occupations within a limited and gender specific range. McMahon & Patton (1997)

found that there are clear gender differences between female and male children as well as adolescents relating to career influences. In their study, the job knowledge of various occupational areas reflected traditional gender stereotyping (p. 372).

Gati, Osipow, and Givon (1995) state that men tend to choose occupations that coincide with the traditional male business and technology orientation. In contrast, women tend to choose occupations within the scope of the traditional female social and humanistic orientation. According to Redpath (1994), there are greater numbers of female students in the areas of art and education in contrast with male students who are clustered in the fields of engineering, business, and science.

There have also been gender differences demonstrated in the process of selecting new occupational fields. In a comparison of career transitions between men and women, women had made more large magnitude career changes as compared with men (Sterrett, 1999). Large magnitude career changes are described as leaving one occupational field and pursuing an entirely different field (p. 251). These transitions are also termed radical career changes (p. 251). Sterrett (1999) concludes, "women's greater experience in making radical transitions may be a strategy that will serve them well in the workforce of the future" (p. 258).

The "Stalled Revolution"

Women's career choices continue to be influenced by the historical roles of mother and homemaker (Fitzgerald, 1994). Fitzgerald states that these influences often result in "downscaling" career aspirations while conversely, family involvement may actually increase and facilitate men's career development. Hochschild (1989) notes that the ideas that individuals have about gender are often fractured and incoherent. She

speaks about the family myths that evolve between partners as a coping strategy regarding the "second shift" of caring for the children and home. These myths serve to ease the conflict that is present in many dual career couples while adjusting to changing family roles and responsibilities. Hochschild (1989) maintains that society is currently in a "stalled revolution" where women have joined the workforce yet a large percentage of men are not sharing the work of home and family resulting in women working the time equivalent of an extra month each year. Hochschild (1997) states that one reason for this difference is due to the perception that "the 'male' world of work seems more honorable and valuable than the 'female' world of home and children" (p. 247). Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) consider the variables of marital/familial status, sex role attitudes, and role conflict to be the major independent variables considered uniquely pertinent to women's career choices and pursuits as compared to men. Lewis (1996) proposes the need for organizational restructuring away from the traditional model of work towards true gender equality where men and women are encouraged to make optimum contributions in both spheres of work and family life.

In a longitudinal study of students who persist in science careers, the variables of home commitment and career commitment related negatively to each other for women while there was no significant correlation found between home and career for men. (Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, Risinger, 1995). Farmer et al. note that the relationship between home and career was not found to be significant for the women while they were in grades 9 and 12, but that ten years later, as life role became more salient, a significant, negative relationship was established between home and career. McCracken and Weitzman (1997) provide support for the notion of multiple role planning as a

developmental process. Women did not feel the need to plan for multiple roles until they perceived that their involvement in multiple roles was in the near or immediate future.

<u>Role Models</u>

Gianakos (1999) noted the absence of professional role models for those individuals with less stable career patterns. She postulates, "Perhaps isolation from professional role models precludes any rise in career self-efficacy, as these persons may just not have sufficient first-hand knowledge about the specific job responsibilities and requirements in order to decide whether they can successfully perform the job" (p. 255).

In a qualitative study of highly achieving women, their mothers were named as positive role models and important influences on their career success (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, & Robinson, 1997). Rainey and Borders (1997) found that factors such as the mother's education and her attitude towards women were strong predictors of the daughter's gender role attitudes (p. 167).

<u>Interdependence vs. Independence</u>

Highly achieving women have been shown to think from a collective rather than an individual perspective about work and personal life including a sense of strong relational connections with family and community (Richie et al., 1997). Richie et al. summarize that the theme of interconnectedness permeates their model of women's career development differentiating it from the general patterns of men.

In a study of identity development and psychological separation, Lucas (1997) found that young women scored lower on functional and emotional independence than men suggesting that they needed more approval, closeness, and emotional support from parents. Further, for women, "being committed to their perspectives involved not only

progression on aspects of career development (being decided on a career and self-exploration) but also maintaining attitudes, values, and beliefs similar to those of their parents" (p. 129).

Academic Success

In a Finnish study of personality antecedents of career orientation, Pulkkinen, Ohranen, and Tolvanen (1999) report that the strongest predictor of high career orientation for women was school success (grade point average) at age 14. Acheivement, shown through grades, was also the strongest variable in predicting persistence in engineering majors for both men and women (Schaefers, Epperson, & Nauta, 1997).

Career Decision-making

Larson, Butler, Wilson, Medora, and Allgood (1994) report that women scored significantly higher than men regarding "life goal awareness" in career decision-making. Life goal awareness is described as "the degree of knowledge, understanding, and insight that an individual possesses in regard to what it is that he or she wants and needs out of life." (p. 81).

McLennan and Arthur (1999) propose an expansion of the cognitive information processing (CIP) approach to career decision making (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 1996) for women. They review eight theoretical propositions in support of the compatibility of the CIP approach with women's career development (p. 85-89):

1. The career development of women, although not fundamentally different from that of men, is more complex and requires attention to women's specific issues.

2.   All individuals, regardless of sex, share the basic human need for fulfillment through meaningful work. Men and women are not fundamentally different in their needs, aspirations, or abilities.

3.   Career is defined as the developmental sequence of all life experiences (including education, paid employment, leisure, homemaking, and volunteer work) that affect one's commitment to work. Life roles are interdependent and occupational decisions should not be made in isolation from those concerning other life roles.

4.   Women are viewed as active agents working toward goals and influencing their environment and their future.

5.   Not all women's issues in career development originate in the individual. Many of the problems women encounter are due to the systemic and structural context in which women build careers.

6.   The counsellor must take an active stance in encouraging women to explore and expand their options while simultaneously weighing the various reality factors that are relevant to women's career choices.

7.   Women will be motivated to explore a wider variety of occupational options to the extent that they (a) believe the options are attainable and (b) view the options as attractive.

8.   Career counselors must be knowledgeable in issues specific to women's career development and must participate in social action to improve access to the workforce for women.

Underlying Assumptions of Traditional Career Theories

Crozier (1999) considers some of the assumptions embedded in traditional theories of career development. She adds that these assumptions do not apply to women, and they no longer apply to men:

1. Work is the primary life role for developing one's identity and meeting one's needs.

2. Occupational choices are made freely without barriers, limitations, or stereotypes affecting one's decision.

3. Career development is a progressive step-wise process.

4. The paid work role can (and even should be) isolated from other major life roles and correspondingly career counselling should be separated from personal or lifestyle counselling.

5. Career achievement is accomplished independently and therefore is completely in the control of the individual, based upon his or her own ability and initiative. (p. 232).

These assumptions do not provide room for a broader conceptualization of career as well as for systemic considerations which impact on the individual's choices. The theories that follow allow for the social, environmental and historical contexts within which individuals make career choices.

Theories Applicable to Women's Career Development

There are four theories of women's career development that attempt to explain some of the gender differences that have been reviewed. In addition, a systems theory of career development will also be considered. The systems focus has not been related

solely towards women but it addresses many of the career influences that are addressed in the other theories of women's career development.

These five theories include firstly, Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise. The second is Hackett and Betz' (1981) theory of self-efficacy. The third is Astin's (1984) sociopsychological model of career choice and work behaviour. The fourth includes the more recent work of Valian (1999) relating to the slower rate of advancement of women as compared to men. Fifthly, Patton and McMahon's (1999) systems theory framework of career development will be considered.

Circumscription and Compromise

There have been various attempts to explain the patterns of women's career choices and development. Gottfredson (1981) notes the importance of early developmental influences on women's career choices. In her theory of circumscription and compromise, Gottfredson states that when a career compromise is necessary, women will first sacrifice interest, next prestige, and lastly, sex type preferences. Various studies have examined Gottfredson's model and found that contrary to her order of compromise, sex type is consistently compromised over prestige (Leung, 1993; Leung & Plake, 1990; Hesketh, Durant, & Pryor, 1990; Hesketh, Elmslie, & Kaldor, 1990). Gati (1993) credits Gottfredson for stimulating research on compromise and encourages a closer look at weaknesses in research design when conflicting evidence is found. The problem of confounding relationships between sex type, prestige, and interests is considered as a factor causing a negative impact on research results (Hesketh et al, 1990a; Hesketh et al., 1990b). Gottfredson herself has alluded to the confounding in interest inventories,

"Because field of work is related to both sex type and prestige, interest inventories are more predictive than might otherwise be expected" (1981, p. 573).

Davey and Stoppard (1993) critique the idea of homogeneity across women in Gottfredson's theory. In studying the occupational expectations of female adolescents, they summarize that Gottfredson's theory can only be partially supported by their findings. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) respond to Gottfredson's theory and argue, "The ubiquity and intensity of the sex role socialization process should not be taken as reason for accepting it." (p. 87). They encourage counsellors to be active agents in creating change.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy theory was originally described by Bandura (1977) as a useful concept in treating anxiety disorders. Hackett and Betz (1981) related Bandura's self-efficacy theory to women's career development. They postulated that women's low self-efficacy expectations were related to the under-representation of women in traditionally male dominated careers. Hackett and Betz (1995) encourage researchers to consider the "interrelationships of career self-efficacy and other key person and environmental variables such as vocational interests and work values, attributions, SES, gender, ethnicity, cognitive information-processing mechanisms, social support, opportunities and barriers, and other factors known to be important in career development." (p.275-276).

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perceptions or beliefs that he or she will be able to successfully perform a given behaviour. Bandura (1997) states, "People's beliefs in their efficacy affect almost everything they do: how they think, motivate themselves, feel, and behave" (p. 19). Hackett and Betz (1997) highlight the importance

of self-efficacy beliefs as potential facilitators or barriers to career choices. Betz (1994) maintains, "career self-efficacy theory is based on subjective perceptions of, rather than objectively measured, characteristics- the important variable influencing individuals' perceived range of career options is not their measured abilities, but their beliefs concerning their competence in various behavioral domains" (p. 36).

Bandura (1997) describes the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: 1. enactive mastery experiences that indicate capability; 2. vicarious experiences (observing role models); 3. verbal persuasion (encouragement from others); and 4. physiological and affective states (levels of anxiety in pursuing specific tasks) (p. 79). These sources of self-efficacy contribute to an individual's overall self-assessment of confidence in pursuing specific activities. Hackett and Betz (1995) highlight the importance of self-efficacy beliefs, "In predicting distant versus more immediate future behaviour, and in predicting complex choice behaviour, career self-efficacy is probably a better predictor than past achievement, in that career self-efficacy not only encompasses information about past performance, but also contains affective and motivational information" (p. 268).

A substantial amount of research has been generated focusing on career self-efficacy and vocational interests (Donnay & Borgen, 1999; Lent, Larkin, & Brown, 1989; Smith & Fouad, 1999), career decision-making (Gianakos, 1995, 1999; Taylor & Popma, 1990), gender differences (Matsui, Ikeda, & Ohnishi, 1989; Matsui & Tsukamoto, 1991; Vasil, 1992), academic performance and persistence (Brown, Lent, & Larkin, 1989; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), job and career search behaviour (Saks and Ashforth,

1999; Solberg, Brown, Good, Fischer, and Nord, 1995), and scale development (Rooney & Osipow, 1992).

The link between self-efficacy and interests has been considered with the conclusion that there are commonalities between the two and yet that they are two distinct constructs (Lent, Larkin, and Brown, 1989; Donnay and Borgen, 1999). Donnay and Borgen (1999) stress the importance of assessing vocational interests and vocational self-efficacy independently rather than confounding them.

Research into self-efficacy gender differences has yielded significant gender specific results. Matsui, Ikeda, and Ohnishi (1989) studied Japanese students and found that males reported equivalent levels of self-efficacy in both male and female dominated occupations while females reported higher self-efficacy in female dominated occupations and lower self-efficacy in male dominated occupations. Japanese students also demonstrated differences relating to Holland's model environments (Matsui and Tsukamoto, 1991). Men scored significantly higher than women for the Realistic domain whereas women scored significantly higher than men for the Artistic domain. In assessing self-efficacy expectations of university faculty members (Vasil, 1992), males reported significantly stronger self-efficacy beliefs related to research. Female faculty reported significantly fewer articles and reports published, and grants received compared with male faculty.

Rooney and Osipow (1992) have constructed a prototype of a task-specific self-efficacy scale. They find that consistent with gender role socialization, females report greatest self-efficacy on items relating to social skills and social service items whereas

males report greatest self-efficacy on physical activity, coordination, and supervision items.

Brown, Lent, and Larkin (1989) found that the grades and persistence of lower aptitude students were facilitated if they possessed high self-efficacy beliefs relating to educational requirements. Bandura (1997) relates the link of self-efficacy and motivation:

> Beliefs of personal efficacy also regulate motivation by shaping aspirations and the outcomes expected for one's efforts. A capability is only as good as its execution. The self-assurance with which people approach and manage difficult tasks determines whether they make good or poor use of their capabilities. Insidious self-doubts can easily overrule the best of skills. (p. 35).

Bandura (1991) summarizes the difference between perceived self-efficacy and locus of control: "Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs about their capabilities to organize and execute designated courses of action. Locus of control refers to people's beliefs that outcomes are dependent on their actions or are the result of chance, fate, or luck" (p. 159). In researching the relationship of self-efficacy and locus of control, Taylor and Popma (1990) conclude that there is a moderate and negative relationship suggesting that, "the more external an individual's attribution of control over events and consequences in life, the lower the confidence in successful completion of career decision-making tasks" (p.28).

Gianakos (1995) found that sex-role identity is an important factor in perceptions of career decision-making self-efficacy. Gianakos (1999) reported that greater levels of decision-making self-efficacy are associated with individuals who demonstrate more stable career choice patterns.

Saks and Ashforth (1999) studied the job search behavior of university graduates and found that job search self-efficacy predicted job search behaviour as well as employment status at graduation. Solberg, Brown, Good, Fischer, and Nord (1995) found that, "career search self-efficacy appears to be a more proximal determinant of career outcomes than is a general sense of human agency" (p. 455).

Lent, Larkin, and Brown (1989) encourage researchers to study the link between the growth of self-efficacy and vocational interests. Betz and Hackett (1986) encourage the research of process as well as content. Content is defined as "what the individual considers or chooses (e.g., careers in science, careers requiring a college degree). The process refers to how decisions are made (e.g., the nature of the exploration and decision-making activities engaged in)" (p. 284).

In considering the contribution of self-efficacy to career counselling, Betz (1994) reminds researchers, "because it is embedded in a learning theory of its origins that is directly applicable to counseling interventions, self-efficacy theory has applied as well as theoretical utility" (p. 36).

<u>A Sociopsychological Model of Career Choice and Behaviour</u>

Astin (1984) proposed a theory that incorporates four constructs: motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity (p. 119). Her theory includes the following principles (p. 119):

1. Work behaviour is motivated activity intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution.

2. Career choices are based on expectations concerning the accessibility of alternative forms of work and their relative capacity to satisfy the three basic needs.

3. Expectations are shaped in part by early socialization through family, childhood play, school experiences, and early work experiences, and in part by the perceived structure of opportunity.

4. Expectations developed through socialization and through early perceptions of the structure of opportunity can be modified by changes in the structure of opportunity, and this modification in expectations can lead to changes in career choice and in work behaviour.

Astin states that the work motivations are the same for both women and men but that work expectations differ due to socialization. She adds that the opportunity structure is changing in the direction of becoming more equal for both women and men (p. 125).

Valian's Theory of Why Women's Advancement is Slow Compared to Men

Valian (1999) incorporates information from the fields of psychology, biology, sociology, and economics to discuss the potential influences upon occupational advancement for women as compared with men. She summarizes two principles at work that together cause the disparity in wages and advancement between men and women. These include the gender schemas that both men and women hold (p. 2) as well as differences in the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage (p. 3).

Valian (1999) explains gender schemas as " a set of implicit, or nonconscious, hypotheses about sex differences" (p.2). She reviews their powerful impact:

Gender schemas affect our expectations of men and women, our evaluation of their work, and their performance as professionals. Both men and women hold the same gender schemas and begin acquiring them in early childhood. Their most important consequence for professional life is that men are consistently overrated, while women are underrated. Whatever emphasizes a man's gender gives him a small advantage, a plus mark. Whatever accentuates a woman's gender results in a small loss for her, a minus mark. (p.2)

Valian (1999) discusses the accumulation of advantage that takes place due to the gender schemas that individuals hold. The small advantages and disadvantages, such as being taken seriously as a professional or being listened to at a meeting, accrue over time. She states that at times, women are told not to make mountains out of molehills and adds that "mountains are molehills, piled one on top of the other" (p. 5).

Valian cites countless examples of research noting various differences between men and women that interact with gender schemas to accumulate greater advantages for men and greater disadvantages for women. For example, women talk less in both public and professional settings than men (p. 5), they are less likely to be perceived as leaders (p. 127), and they are more reluctant to negotiate for higher salary, promotions, and resources (p. 327). Valian provides suggestions for women such as seeking out

occupational information, becoming an expert in a particular area, and overcoming internal barriers to effectiveness (p. 327).

A Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

Patton and McMahon (1999) have proposed a systems theory framework for both women and men. They view the individual within the context of a larger system, and this system is composed of two subsystems: "the social contextual system (the other people systems with which the individual interacts) and the environmental/societal contextual system (the environment and society)" (p. 158). Patton and McMahon review the many influences upon career development including individual differences such as gender, values, sexual orientation, ability, disability, interests, skills, age, world-of-work knowledge, physical attributes, aptitudes, ethnicity, self-concept, personality, beliefs, and health (p. 157). The social system includes all of the individual influences along with educational institutions, peers, family, media, community groups, and the workplace (p. 159). The environmental-societal system includes the previous two systems plus the influences of geographical location, political decisions, historical trends, globalization, socioeconomic status, and the employment market (p. 160). The authors also consider the recursive nature of all the influences, the changes that take place over time, and the impact of chance circumstances that are unplanned.

Patton and McMahon (1999) summarize the advantages of a systems theory framework for integrating theory and practice:

1. The important contribution of all career theories can be recognized.

2. A systems theory framework can place extant theories in the context of other theories, and their interconnections can be demonstrated.

3. A systems theory perspective recognizes the contribution to career development theory and practice of other disciplines.

4. Systems theory brings to career development a congruence between theory and practice and new approaches for use in career practice.

5. The emphasis in career development is placed on the individual and not on theory. Therefore, systems theory can be applicable at a macro level of theory analysis, as well as at a micro level of individual analysis.

6. A systems theory perspective enables practitioners to choose from the theory that is most relevant to the needs and situation of the individual.

7. Systems theory offers a perspective that underlies the philosophy reflected in the move from positivist approaches to constructivist approaches (p. 166-168).

Patton and McMahon add that a systems theory approach to career development can broaden the definition of career. They provide the example of "changing from the existing 'nontraditional careers for girls' emphasis to an emphasis on reclaiming the diversity of women's lives and fostering the development of broad choices, including, if chosen, the homemaker role" (p. 169).

Summary

In summary, self-efficacy theory has enjoyed an abundance of empirical investigation since its inception as a plausible theory explaining women's career choices. In contrast, the ideas regarding circumscription and compromise have shown a minimal amount of research interest in recent years. Perhaps the theory of self-efficacy, embedded in a learning theory which assumes that an individual has the power to learn and change

behaviour, is more palatable to scientist-practitioners who intrinsically desire positive changes in women's career opportunities. Conversely, Gottfredson's ideas appear less optimistic regarding change. However, both are valuable theories in providing possible explanations for gender differences in career paths.

Valian's (1999) work is more recent and certainly takes into account the barriers that may be responsible for the "glass ceiling" (p. 1). Astin's (1984) sociological model was very timely when it first emerged as a guide in considering women's career choices. Her ideas concerning the structure of opportunity have been encapsulated in the writings of many researchers interested in explaining women's career choices.

Patton and McMahon's (1999) systems theory perspective provides a framework that involves the consideration of many factors and a recursive, ever-changing kaleidoscope of current influences that impact upon the career decisions of individuals. Their systems theory appears to make room for many factors that have had particular relevance to women's career paths such as the inclusion of relationship and family influences as well as the diversity in timelines regarding career decisions.

Research Recommendations Regarding Women's Career Development

Betz and Hackett (1986) encourage researchers to study the process of women's career decision-making. In a review of a series of articles on women's career development, Hackett (1997) suggests that further research be devoted to the relationships between women's identity development and career decision-making. Betz (1994) highlights the importance of making a distinction between self-concept and identity. She adds that a self-concept contains multiple identities as well as evaluative

aspects such as self-esteem, therefore, making it "too broad in its potential meaning to be used either theoretically or practically without careful definition and specification" (p. 39).

The present study will consider the influence of women's gender identities in career decision-making and will focus on the dynamic process of their career decisions. The women in this study are all nearing graduation with the goal of attaining a Bachelor of Arts degree. This population was chosen in part because of the relevance of career decision-making due to the graduation transition phase. Secondly, a generalist degree allows for a broad range of possible occupational choices as compared to degrees that are tied to specific occupations.

Bachelor of Arts Graduates

Higher Education

The term "liberal arts" is used interchangeably along with "Bachelor of Arts". A liberal arts education is contrasted with a vocational or technical education (Winter & McClellund, 1978). The Bachelor of Arts degree allows an individual to obtain a broad base of knowledge in a variety of subjects. Seligman (1994) considers the swing of the pendulum from the pragmatic nature of education in the 1970's to an emphasis on "broad exposure to knowledge" that has existed into the 1990's (p. 335). Coyte (1985) states,

Arts degrees are often regarded as next to useless, their graduates the effete and disenchanted monuments to educational and social indulgence...to dismiss arts degrees as irrelevant and inappropriate is to take a stance which fails to come to terms with the very essence of arts degrees- their essential diversity (p. 47).

Thousands of students obtain university degrees in Canada each year. In 1998, approximately 172,000 students across Canada were granted university degrees with a large portion of these being Bachelor of Arts degrees (Statistics Canada, 1998). Out of the total number of graduating students, fifty-eight percent were female and forty-two percent were male. There is some evidence that female students tend to be concentrated in fields of arts and education whereas male students are primarily concentrated in engineering, business, and science (Redpath, 1994).

This population of arts students was chosen for various reasons. First of all, career choices and determination of a future life path are serious considerations for students approaching graduation. Seligman (1994) notes, "Young adults probably do more choosing and planning of their lives than does any other age group" (p. 303). Seligman adds, "The career development of most young adult women follows a course of considerable change, leading to the establishment of a clear career direction by their mid-20's" (p. 315).

Secondly, students who graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree may experience greater difficulty in deciding future direction due to the general nature of their education. Depending on individual perceptions, an arts degree may be viewed as a springboard for further study or work opportunities in a diversity of fields. Conversely, it may be viewed as a generic degree that leaves a new graduate with questionable job skills that appear nebulous and intangible. Baumgardner (1989) speaks of the misconception that both students and their parents hold that there are "reasonably clear and reasonably certain paths to lucrative jobs." He adds, "The last thing that students want to be told is that

these beliefs do not hold true. When they are told, they feel betrayed" (p. 176). In a Canadian report on higher education and employment, McDowell (1991) states, "The economic rate of return is decreasing for an undergraduate degree. The qualification is coming to be regarded as a basic requirement for employment" (p. 176). Coyte (1985) considers the greater dropout rate for students pursuing generalist degrees as compared with those pursuing specialist degrees. He emphasizes the value of a generalist degree in allowing students to explore potential occupational areas without making a premature commitment to one occupation.

It is not surprising that graduates often experience concern regarding future employment. In a study of Canadian graduates who had held bachelor's degrees in arts for two years, 69.4 percent were in jobs that did not require their level of education (Redpath, 1994). In this study, the number of arts students who were mismatched was considerably higher than those in the faculties of business, science, education, and engineering. In another Canadian study, eighty-four percent of students indicated that a primary reason for pursuing higher education was to facilitate the likelihood of obtaining challenging, high paying, or interesting work after graduation (Gomme, Hall, & Murphy, 1993). There appears to be a void between students' expectations and economic reality.

Bachelor of arts graduates have demonstrated a history of frequent job change during the early years of employment (Crozier & Grassick, 1996). Graduates, particularly liberal arts alumni, state that two years after graduation, their skills, abilities, education, and training are being underutilized in the workplace (Redpath, 1994). Similarly, liberal arts graduates have difficulty finding work related to their major (Buamgardner, 1989; Crozier & Grassick, 1996; Littlepage, Perry & Hodge, 1990; & Seligman, 1994).

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) highlight the importance of education relating to career choices, "the decisions the individual makes concerning her/his higher education, both the level and major areas of study, will be among the most important career decisions she/he ever makes" (p. 54). Ball (1992) summarizes some of the benefits of a B.A. as assisting individuals to develop the capacity for independent judgment, independent learning, and leadership ability. Useem (1989, p. 68) speaks of the "hallmarks" of a liberal arts education as communication, leadership, and analytic ability. The essence of an arts degree is its diversity (Coyte, 1985).

School-to-Work Transition

New graduates typically have a strenuous period between graduation, the job search, and adjustment in their new work setting (Baumgardner, 1989). Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips (1994) studied the dynamic nature of job search activity of students nearing graduation and after graduation. They found that graduates' job search behaviour was consistent with a sequential model where students "search broadly to develop a pool of potential jobs, then examine jobs within that pool in detail, reopening the search only if the initial pool does not lead to an acceptable job offer" (p. 739)

In a study of the psychological health of employed and unemployed recent graduates, Cassidy (1994) found that nine months after graduation, unemployed graduates had a more positive approach to problem-solving, higher achievement motivation, more perceived social support, were more assertive, and felt less hopeless than the employed students. Cassidy summarizes that perhaps recent graduates are better able to cope with the stresses of unemployment and he concludes that "opting for a job which does not

meet expectations or aspirations may be more psychologically damaging in the short term than being unemployed and hopeful" (p. 385).

During the transition from university to employment, there are changes that take place in new graduates self-construction (Fournier & Payne, 1994). Often, there are dramatic changes in the social networks of young adults during the graduation transition (Sollie & Fischer, 1988). Yamamoto, Sawada, Minami, Ishii, & Inoue (1992) state that based on their research findings, about a six month time period is necessary for graduates to adjust to the workplace.

In a Canadian study of graduates' earnings during the first 12 months after graduation, men had net earnings 17 percent greater than women and men also demonstrated better self-assessed prospects for promotion (Hughes & Lowe, 1993).

Levinson (1996, p.250) speaks about the internal and external pressures that are experienced by women at the end of the early adult transition and anticipating graduation. Both internally and externally they feel pressure to become increasingly independent, while at the same time, there is pressure to delay entry into the next life phase. Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering (1989) state that "graduation forces a reformulation of goals" (p. 154). Post-secondary students often lack the motivation or preparation to make career decisions until they are in the final stages of their programs (Crozier & Grassick, 1996; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

<u>Early Adulthood</u>

Levinson speaks about the era of early adulthood that he considers an age range of approximately 17 to 45 (Levinson, 1996). He states,

Biologically, the twenties and thirties are the peak years of the life cycle. In social and psychological terms, early adulthood is the season for forming and pursuing youthful aspirations, establishing a niche in society, raising a family, and, as the era ends, becoming a "senior member" of the adult world…we have to make crucially important choices regarding spouse, family, work, and lifestyle before we have the maturity or life experience to choose wisely. Early adulthood is the era in which we are most buffeted by our own passions and ambitions from within, and by the demands of family, community, and society from without. (p.19-20).

Harmon (1989, p. 61) considers the "youthful optimism" that was demonstrated in her study gauging the career aspirations of a group of freshmen women in 1968 and another group in 1983. Harmon adds that there was "youthful optimism about the amount of education and socioeconomic status to be achieved which was tempered by reality in the adult women" (the first group queried again in 1981).

Birth Order

The present study includes the consideration of birth order by collecting demographic information regarding participants' birth position in the family. In the researchers' clinical experience of group facilitation with university students, it was observed that, at times, there appeared to be an over-representation of first-born students compared with other birth positions. The decision was made to include birth order in the demographic data to note the representation of each birth position across participants. There was no effort made to screen for birth position. The birth order information solely

provides additional demographic information along with considerations such as age and cultural background. Therefore, the data is useful for considering the applicability of the findings to other groups that may be similar according to birth position as well as age and cultural background.

There is some evidence to demonstrate that birth order can influence career aspirations (Bohmer, P. & Sitton, S., 1993; Marjoribanks, 1989; White, Campbell, Stewart, Davies, & Pilkington, 1997). In a study of notable American women born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bohmer & Sitton, 1993), some differences were noted across birth orders such as the higher percentage of writers among first born individuals and the higher percentage of performers among last borns. Bohmer and Sitton consider the possibility that later borns may make riskier career choices than first or middle children (p. 379). Bohmer and Sitton conclude, "family configuration may operate to produce personality differences among siblings that in turn influence career choices and achievement" (p. 379).

Marjoribanks (1989) notes the influence of birth order on the status attainment of young adults that also varies according to the three ethnic groups in the study: Anglo-Australian, Greek, and Southern Italian.

White et. al. (1997) encourage researchers to consider the psychological birth order of individuals rather than the actual birth order. The psychological birth order is the degree to which one identifies with four types of birth order positions in the family including the oldest, middle, youngest, and only child position (p.90). The findings of their study show that oldest children were drawn to social and business contact occupations, middle children demonstrated low interest in conventional and data-based

occupations, and youngest children demonstrated low interest in science and technical fields.

Summary

Although women's career development is currently an active area of research (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1994) and while it has been studied for approximately three decades, there are still many unanswered and emerging questions worthy of further research. The literature was also reviewed regarding the population of students, particularly those who focus on obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree. Additionally, there is some evidence provided to show that birth order can make a difference in career choice.

In light of the many differences noted between men and women's career development, it is a difficult task to draw final conclusions because of the shifting that is continually taking place. Gender role socialization and the structure of opportunity continue to shift (Astin, 1984), contributing to changes in women's career choices. Considering women's career aspirations, Harmon (1989) demonstrated differences concerning the occupational choices of two groups of women studied with a 15-year time span between the groups. Moen, Erickson, and Dempster-McClain (1997) note that over a 30-year period, mothers had become less traditional and more like their daughters. Astin (1984) discusses the changes taking place over time in both the socialization process as well as the structure of opportunity. She adds that these influence each other creating new expectations for women regarding the kinds of career options that are available. Astin states "recent years have witnessed accelerations in trends connected with the institutions of family, education, and work, trends that bear directly on work

expectations" (p. 123). She considers many of these trends citing examples such as increased longevity, the declining birthrate, the increasing divorce rate, and changes in the economy. Since opportunities for women are in a state of flux due to societal changes, a focus of the present study is to better understand how graduating women are currently conceptualizing their career options.

The graduation transition is a time to reformulate goals (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989) and students are generally motivated to make career decisions at this time (Crozier & Grassick, 1996; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Students who obtain bachelor's degrees often find themselves underemployed and mismatched with the world of work after graduation (Redpath, 1994). Yet, 84% of students state that the main reason for pursuing a degree is to assist them in obtaining high paying, challenging, or interesting work (Gomme, Hall, & Murphy, 1993).

An individual's birth order may influence career aspirations (Bohmer, P. & Sitton, S., 1993; Marjoribanks, 1989; White, Campbell, Stewart, Davies, & Pilkington, 1997). In the present study, the decision to include birth order in the demographic information was made based on the researchers' clinical experience that sometimes, when individuals engage in voluntary and optional activities, there is an over-representation of specific birth positions to the exclusion of other birth positions. Birth order was provided specifically to add demographic information.

The present research was an exploratory study focusing on women currently graduating and the dynamic process of their career decision-making. Researchers have been encouraged to study the process of women's career decision-making (Betz & Hackett, 1986). Considering various theories of women's career development, secondary

questions were formulated to guide the researcher's inquiry process focusing on compromise, perception of gender effect, and level of confidence. There was no attempt made to prove or disprove any of the existing theories during data collection and analysis. The questions utilized to guide the study include the initial primary question and three secondary questions:

1. What is the process by which women graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree make choices regarding their career paths?

2. What compromises are made?

3. What is their perception of the effect of gender on these choices?

4. What is their level of confidence regarding the ability to achieve career goals?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Qualitative Methods

Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski (1999) review the contribution of qualitative research in organizational and vocational psychology over the past two decades. They encourage researchers to utilize qualitative methodology in designing research. Davey and Stoppard (1993) encourage the use of qualitative methods to further understand the occupational choices and aspirations of young women. Farmer, Wardrop, Anderson, & Risinger (1995) consider the use of interview data as "a good way to begin to untangle some of the puzzles surrounding women's career choices" (p. 169).

For the present study, various qualitative research methods were considered and the focus group method was chosen, due in part, to its unique group format. A group data collection format allows individuals to interact with others in the group. The resulting group synergy (Gray-Vickrey, 1993) provides collective information where individuals can hear and respond to each other in a safe environment. This process was considered to be useful in understanding how female Bachelor of Arts students make choices about their career paths. In hearing the statements of others, participants have the chance to echo similar concerns, disagree with others' opinions in terms of their own experiences, and add to their own responses after further reflection on the statements of others. Although there are also potential negative group effects such as censoring and conforming, (Carey & Smith, 1994), these effects were attended to and minimized by the researcher.

Focus Groups

The present study utilized focus group methodology. The use of focus groups

dates back to the 1930's, when social scientists used them as an alternative to individual

interviews (Gray-Vickrey, 1993). They grew from the realization that it was cost-

effective to interview several individuals in the time that it typically took to interview one

person. In the early 1940's, focus groups were used in the evaluation of audience

responses to radio programs (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Currently, focus groups are

the most frequently used method of evaluating television commercials (Gray-Vickrey,

1993). Focus groups have been widely used in marketing research over the past several

decades and have just recently returned to be used in non-marketing, social science

research (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). Focus groups are still in an early stage of

development regarding their contributions to social science research (Morgan, 1988).

Morgan encourages researchers to draw on the body of knowledge from both qualitative

research as well as the use of focus groups in marketing.

Definition and Use of Focus Groups

The ingredients of a focus group are: 1. people, 2. assembled in a series of groups,

3. who possess certain characteristics and, 4. provide data, 5. of a qualitative nature, 6. in

a focused discussion (Krueger, 1994). Focus groups are generally composed of about six

to ten people and generally last one and a half to two hours (Brotherson & Goldstein,

1992; Greenbaum, 1998). In some cases, it is beneficial to decrease the numbers of

participants within each group (Kreuger, 1998b). Most focus group studies involve four

to six groups (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). The decision regarding the number of groups

depends on the needs of the study (Krueger, 1994).

The leader of a focus group is named the moderator (Greenbaum, 1998; Knodel, 1993; Morrison, 1998). Traditionally, an "outside expert" was hired to conduct focus groups but a model has evolved using a collaborative approach: volunteers, staff members, and nonresearchers can be placed in the centre of a focus group project (Krueger, 1994). The moderator must possess some key characteristics such as superior listening skills, high energy level, and strong organizational skills in order to facilitate a group effectively (Greenbaum, 1998). It is also necessary that a moderator be knowledgeable regarding group dynamics (Morrison, 1998). The moderator is more in control of a focus group than an interviewer is in control of an individual interview due to the facilitating effects of group dynamics (Morrison, 1998). Effective moderating is drawn from three streams: 1. interviewing techniques, 2. leadership studies, and 3. group dynamics (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). At times, the moderator may face a significant challenge if participants are opinionated and hostile regarding the topic of discussion (Trick & Hunter, 1994). The moderator needs to balance sensitivity and empathy but also objectivity and detachment (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The moderator roles include: the seeker of wisdom, the enlightened novice, the expert consultant, the challenger, the referee, the writer, the team-discussion leader and technical expert, and the therapist (Krueger, 1994).

Homogeneity across participants is an important selection factor of focus groups (Knodel, 1993; Krueger, 1994; Morrison, 1998). Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) state, "the more socially and intellectually homogenous the interview group, the more productive its reports" (p. 137).

Various details such as the spatial arrangement of the room are important factors to consider. Chairs should be arranged in a circle or semi-circle rather than classroom like rows where participants may be consciously or unconsciously concerned about the "correctness" of their answers (Merton et al., 1990, p. 139).

Research using focus groups is either exploratory or explanatory (Saint-Germain, Bassford, & Montano, 1993). The researcher is looking for information. Knodel (1993) encourages researchers to keep the guidelines brief and to remember that "the objective of a focus group is an in-depth examination of the concepts being covered" (p. 37). Knodel recommends using a set of guidelines to facilitate discussion and to formulate questions in a natural fashion as the discussion progresses. Primary and secondary questions are utilized. Primary questions are designed to introduce topics and secondary questions probe in greater detail (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus groups make use of qualitative data (Krueger, 1994). Focus group methodology is now one of the most widely used qualitative research tools in the applied social sciences (Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy, & Flay, 1991). It can also be one method used in triangulation of several methods (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). For instance, two ways that focus groups can contribute to the development of a quantitative investigation include: 1. focus group development can inform the actual content of the survey questionnaire- its wording, item development, and research questions that affect its design, and 2. focus groups can provide an understanding of what the given research project means to members of the study population (O'Brien, 1993).

Focus groups have been used with diverse populations. Some examples of their use include: a follow-up study of a group-based needs assessment program for

unemployed people (Borgen, 1999), defining barriers to health-care for older Hispanic women (Saint-Germain et al., 1993), assisting in the development of a quantitative health survey for gay and bisexual men at risk of AIDS (O'Brien, 1993), improving child and youth care services at a hospital based wellness centre (Trick & Hunter, 1994), understanding the caregivers' experience of living with a relative who has Alzheimer's Disease (Gray-Vickrey, 1993), using collective norm effects in the development of an adolescent tobacco use cessation program (Sussman, Burton, Dent, Stacy & Flay, 1991), and in providing useful information specific to programs, policies, and people significant to early childhood special education (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). Focus groups have also been used to critique television advertisements, to investigate socially sensitive topics such as shoplifting, and to explore experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of new car purchasers (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups can be used before an experience such as planning, needs assessment, assets analysis, program design, or market research, during a program such as in customer surveys, formative evaluations, or recruiting new clientele for existing programs, or after a program or experience has been conducted such as assessment, summative evaluation or program postmortems to discover what went wrong (Krueger, 1994).

Advantages of focus group research are that they: 1. provide data from a group of individuals in the same amount of time that it takes to do one interview, 2. provide group synergy, which is much like brainstorming, 3. participants have the opportunity to validate information given by others, 4. individuals are provided with a safe environment in which to share thoughts and feelings, and 5. allows researchers to have direct contact with participants so they can clarify questions and probe for deeper information (Gray-

Vickrey, 1993). Disadvantages of focus groups include limits to generalizability of the findings and the number of questions that can be adequately answered is limited (Gray-Vickrey, 1993).

The major positive aspect of focus groups is the opportunity to collect rich, experiential information. However, the moderator must also watch for the potential impact of censoring and conforming (Carey & Smith, 1994). The group itself can cause an inhibiting effect on some members (Merton et al., 1990). Focus groups may induce certain group effects that might bias responses, such as polarization of attitudes and brainstorming (Sussman et al, 1991).

Most professional focus group moderators or research companies use an extended focus group model, which includes a pre-group questionnaire in order to help commit group members to a position before group discussion begins (Sussman et. al., 1991). If the participants have had the chance to consider the topic before coming together in a group, the conversation will be more informative and more lively (Zeller, 1993).

In analyzing the data, the researcher can explore three levels: group level, individual level, and comparison of individual with group data (Carey & Smith, 1994). The type of analysis chosen can range from highly impressionistic to sophisticated computer analysis and this depends on the original research as well as the informational needs of the study (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Generally, one is looking for trends and patterns that are occurring across the various groups (Krueger, 1994). Morgan (1988) recommends that the moderator record field notes after each group which becomes a part of the analysis. Morgan adds that the exercise of note-taking also assists the moderator to be conscious of his or her own biases and expectations as the study progresses. Thus, this

self-awareness can prevent the moderator from confirming biases in subsequent focus groups. Richardson (1994) speaks of the exercise of writing as a "method of inquiry" and "a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516).

There have been some interesting effects found from focus group studies. For example, in a study involving older Hispanic women, the participants enjoyed the experience so much that they were disappointed to learn that the groups were only scheduled to meet for one session each, as they wanted the groups to be ongoing (Saint-Germain et al, 1993). In another study regarding adolescent tobacco use, it was noted that focus groups themselves were shown to be a motivational strategy although this is not an intended function of focus groups (Sussman et al, 1991).

Morgan and Krueger (1993) encourage researchers to consider using focus group methodology "when investigating complex behaviour and motivations" (p. 16). This methodology was selected as a research and analysis tool due to its appropriateness in considering the complexity of women's career decision-making process. Focus group methodology has also been an effective way of learning about the range of opinion and degree of consensus present in a group (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Another reason for the choice of this methodology included the unique aspect of group interaction where members can hear and respond to each others' statements. This element differs from most other qualitative methods that are traditionally based on individual interviews. The potential for group interaction reflects the natural process of career decision-making which is generally relational rather than purely an individual process.

Metaphors

Metaphors were incorporated in the research to provide additional information regarding the process of women's career development related to the graduation transition. Specifically, metaphors were utilized to provide additional information relating to possible themes across participants as well as providing affective information associated with the transition period of university graduation. Kreuger (1998c) encourages the use of metaphors in focus group research. Amundson (1996) highlights the value of using metaphor relating to career issues. Barker (1985) considers the use of metaphors throughout history, "Metaphor has been an essential feature of human communication from time immemorial" (p. 7). Pearce (1996) states, "Metaphor's economy of expression compresses communication, thus organizing and conveying large quantities of information" (p. 2). Metaphors expand an individual's creative capacity (Combs & Freedman, 1990) and the "rich imagery" facilitates further discussion (Sunderland, 1997-98, p. 138).

Many current career metaphors are outdated when compared to the current economic realities. Savickas (1995) notes that the familiar metaphor of a ladder is an outdated symbol of career. The instability of jobs is a current reality due to globalization, downsizing, the increase of short-term contract work replacing full-time continuing labour, and other factors. Archaic expectations about career need to be re-thought and re-cast. Vondracek and Kawasaki (1995) consider the outdated idea of "40 years and a gold watch" that many career development theories are based on.

Focusing on the current day economic realities, Moses (1997) considers fifty career metaphors generated by attendees at a human resources conference and concludes

that the overriding theme of the metaphors is the loss of protection. She reflects the current perception of work in her chapter title "Welcome to tempworld." (p. 109). Moses (1997) provides the metaphorical example of an animal in the zoo that is fed and cared for as the old metaphor of career (p. 110). The new career metaphor is the animal in the wild that has to find its own resources in order to survive. She adds that the new metaphor is more natural and contains greater uncertainty and yet, more possibilities.

Participants

The sample consisted of 21 female students from University of British Columbia who were currently enrolled in the third or fourth year of an arts degree program.

Participant Characteristics

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 42 with a mean of 25.4. See Table 1 for demographic information of the sample.

Table 1
Demographics

Age	Cultural Background	Area of Study	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
29	Serbian	Psychology	Accountant	Journalist
33	Canadian	French/ German	Mother Small Business Owner	Business Owner Accountant
26	Latin American	International Relations and French Literature	Nurse	Not Applicable
21	Chinese	Sociology	Registered Nurse	Restaurant Manager
22	Canadian	Sociology	Secretary in Law Firm	Lawyer
21	Guatemala/ Canadian	Political Science	Microfilm Technician, Spanish Tutor, Entrepreneur	Civil Engineer, Entrepreneur

Table 1 (continued)
Demographics

Age	Cultural Background	Area of Study	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation
27	English	Creative Writing/ English Literature	Unknown	Businessman
26	Welsh/ Canadian	Psychology	Photographer	Bank Analyst
24	Canadian/ Scottish, Welsh, Dutch	History	Teacher	Teacher
28	Scottish	International Relations/ Economics	Accounting (administration)	Journalist
32	3rd generation Canadian/ Ukrainian, Polish, Icelandic, Scottish roots	History	Nurse	Self-employed, Restaurant owner
27	Canadian	Political Science/ International Relations	Supervisor-Quality Control	Civil Servant
21	Canadian	Creative Writing	Teacher, Caterer	Accountant, Consultant
20	Canadian	Philosophy	Kitchen/Bathroom Designer	Business/Sales Manager
23	Canadian	Sociology	Project Coordinator	Realtor
22	Japanese	Sociology	Elementary Teacher, Homemaker	Airline Employee
42	Canadian/ Swedish-Irish descent	Psychology	Homemaker	Retired Civil Engineer
23	Korean	English	Homemaker	Entrepreneur
22	Canadian/ Dutch and German roots	Psychology	Teacher	Teacher
22	Taiwanese	Psychology	Nurse	Doctor
22	Chinese	English/ French	Travel Agency Manager	Retired

Data were also collected regarding the birth order of participants and number of

siblings. The number of children in the family ranged from one to five with a mean of

2.9 children per family. 38 percent of participants were first-born children, 52 percent were second-born, and 10 percent were third-born. See Table 2 for data regarding birth order.

Table 2
Birth Order

Brother 24	**Me 22**	Sister 18		
Brother 26	**Me 22**			
Sister 44	**Me 42**	Brother 41	Brother 38	
Brother 26	**Me 23**	Sister 20	Brother 17	
Brother 28	Brother 27	**Me 22**	Step-siblings (not included in calculation of mean)	
Sister 39	Sister 37	**Me 32**	Sister 27	
Sister 28	**Me 27**			
Me 21	Sister 18	Brother 16	Brother 15	
Me 20	Sister 17			
Me 23	Brother 21	Brother 19		
Me 22	Sister 21	Sister 18		
Brother 26	**Me 24**			
Me 28	Brother 25	Brother 22		
Sister 30	**Me 27**	Brother 25	Brother 24	Brother 21
Sister 29	**Me 26**			
Me 29	Brother 27			
Sister 36	**Me 33**	Brother 29		
Me 26				
Sister 24	**Me 21**			
Me 22	Brother 18	Brother 11		
Sister 23	**Me 21**	Sister 20		

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited through various means including four classroom visits to various senior level arts classes, informing counsellors and academic advisors about the study, and posting advertisements describing the study at various locations on the university campus (see Appendix A for advertisement example).

Prospective participants were instructed to phone the researcher for further information regarding the study. The study was advertised as a two-session career-planning group with a focus group component for the first session. During this initial phone call, students were provided with information regarding the nature of the study including an explanation about the format of the first session compared with the second session. Those students who met the criteria for inclusion in the study and expressed interest in joining one of the groups were added to one of the scheduled groups. The criteria for inclusion consisted of being a female arts student who plans to graduate within two years. The phone conversations ranged from five to twenty minutes. After assessing both interest and eligibility for the study, participants were informed regarding the general topics of the focus group discussion. Zeller (1993) states that when participants have the opportunity to consider the topic areas previous to the group session, it results in a more lively and informative focus group.

Formulation of Focus Group Questions

The final set of questions that were utilized for the focus groups were chosen through a process of several revisions. Initially, the researcher generated 31 questions that could be used for data collection. Focus group research can be either explanatory or exploratory (Saint-Germain, Bassford, & Montano, 1993). The present research was exploratory and any questions that seemed either leading or focused on proving theory were revised or discarded. Through further reflection and consultation with committee members, eight questions were chosen (see Appendix D for focus group questions). An example of the selection and revision process includes the following: one of the original questions along with the secondary questions included "If you had been born male, do

you think that you would have made different career choices? If yes, why? What choices?" The purpose of the question was to inquire about perceptions regarding gender roles pertaining to the participants' own career paths. Through consultation, this question was revised to form question #7 "How do you think being a woman influences and impacts your career direction?" The second question is more open-ended and exploratory than the original question.

Stewart & Shamdasani (1990) discuss the use of primary and secondary questions in focus group research. Secondary questions were considered and added to four of the primary questions. The order of the questions was carefully considered so that easier questions requiring less risk were asked early in the group and those questions requiring a stronger sense of safety and familiarity with other participants and group facilitators were left towards the end of the group. For example, for the last question, participants were asked to draw a metaphor of their graduation transition and informed that they would share it with the other group members. If they had been asked to draw a metaphor at the very beginning of the group, it could have been perceived as a threatening request to share artwork with a group of strangers. Similarly, question #5, which asks participants to rate their confidence levels on a scale of one to ten, would have likely been more difficult if asked as question #1.

Data Collection

All of the career planning groups were held at University of British Columbia and were completed within a six-week time period. Each of the career planning groups was two sessions long with each session lasting two hours. The first session of each group was conducted as a focus group. The second session was provided to assist students with

negotiating the school-to-work transition. The second session was designed to assist in participant recruiting as well as in showing appreciation for their involvement in the study by providing information tailored to the specific population of female Bachelor of Arts students. Only the first session was utilized for data collection.

During each of the focus groups, light refreshments were served in order to facilitate a more comfortable atmosphere (Gray-Vickrey, 1993; Kreuger, 1998b). At the beginning of each group, participants were asked to sign a letter of consent. Students were also asked to complete a pre-group questionnaire. The questionnaire had several purposes. Firstly, it was used to collect demographic information. Secondly, it included questions to assist participants in focusing on the topics of the focus group in preparation for group discussion (Sussman et al., 1991 & Zeller, 1993). Sussman et al. caution about group effects such as polarization of attitudes and brainstorming, which can bias responses. The pre-group questionnaire assisted participants to consider their own positions individually, without the influence of other opinions. As well as assisting participants to focus on the topic of career development, the pre-group questionnaire also provided additional data that would not be directly covered in the focus group questions. These included questions about past occupational options that have been excluded, definitions of career success, and graduation concerns.

Each focus group was approximately two hours in length ranging from one hour and forty minutes to two hours and fifteen minutes. Six focus groups were conducted with two to six participants in each group. The groups were restricted in size in order to ensure thorough coverage of all questions including time allowance for some discussion and clarification of participant responses as needed (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). Focus

group questions were asked in a semi-structured format and all group interviews were audio-recorded. Each group was co-facilitated by both the researcher and an assistant researcher. The researcher was the moderator of the group and one of three research assistants was present to record participant responses to the focus group questions. The three research assistants were all female counselling psychology graduate students. All of the research assistants were familiar with career theories. Female research assistants were purposely chosen to facilitate free expression from participants, particularly regarding issues of gender differences.

At the beginning of each group, the researcher briefly reviewed group norms, such as confidentially and the importance of the views of each participant. As the researcher asked the focus group questions, students were invited to respond. These responses were recorded on flip chart paper by the research assistant. The researcher was attuned to potential group effects (Borgen, Pollard, Amundson, & Westwood, 1989) that could jeopardize the quality of data collection. For example, groups have an inhibiting effect on some members (Merton et al., 1990). Therefore, the researcher and research assistant focused initially on facilitating a comfortable group atmosphere and secondly, providing structure to assure that each participant had opportunity to state her opinion. Another potential group effect includes censoring and conforming (Carey & Smith, 1994). In order to reduce these effects, participants were invited to vary the order of their responses so that the same student would not always be the first to respond to a question.

The responses were recorded verbatim as much as was possible. The researcher and research assistant both clarified participant responses as needed to assure that the recorded information was accurately reflecting the meaning of individual students.

Near the end of the focus group session, participants were invited to individually draw a metaphor that depicts the experience of graduation transition. They were provided with paper and a selection of felt markers and oil pastels.

While the students were drawing their metaphors, the researcher and assistant researcher discussed the main points emerging from the focus group through a brief review of the participant responses written on flip chart paper. After participants described their metaphors, the main points of the focus group were summarized and feedback was solicited regarding the accuracy of the summary. As noted by Frankland and Bloor (1999, p. 153), it is very difficult to reassemble the same individuals of a focus group at a later date. Therefore, the main points emerging from the group were reviewed within the context of the group immediately after data collection.

The main points of the group differed somewhat across groups but there were also many similarities. An example of one group summary that was reviewed with participants by the researcher near the end of the group includes the following: "Most of you planned to pursue a B.A. before entering higher education, you are interested in many different occupational options, you described assumptions about occupations that were later tempered with the reality of actual work responsibilities, you have made some compromises that have not seemed like significant compromises, there is general agreement that your confidence level does not make a large impact on overall career goals, you are more focused on occupational goals compared with your mothers, and the group is divided regarding whether or not gender impacts career direction." Students were invited to clarify and add their thoughts about the accuracy of the summary provided

by the researcher and assistant researcher. In all six groups, the students agreed that the summary accurately reflected their statements in response to the focus group questions.

After the summary, the pre-group questionnaire was handed back to students and they were invited to make changes to their written statements as needed in an alternate colour of ink to note the changes. The students were also provided with note cards and were asked to respond individually to the following two questions: 1. What have you learned about yourself or others during this discussion? and 2. Describe your experience of participating in this group.

At the end of each focus group session, the researcher and assistant researcher met together for approximately 30 minutes to debrief their experiences of facilitating the group. The purpose of this debriefing was to assist in assuring greater validity and reliability of the findings. During this debriefing discussion, the researcher and assistant researcher compared their observations regarding the responses of participants, group summaries, general impressions regarding the metaphors, as well as discussion of the general process of the group. The researcher and assistant researcher also focused on challenging their own assumptions and biases by comparing their perceptions about any surprises or curiosities regarding the participants' statements. Kreuger (1998c) encourages debriefing directly after each group and adds that this practice often provides helpful insights useful for research analysis. The researcher recorded field notes during the debriefing session subsequent to each focus group session. Morgan (1988) encourages the practice of writing field notes after each group in order that the researcher become more conscious of personal biases and to keep from confirming such biases in subsequent groups.

Some examples of the curiosities and surprises discussed by the researcher and assistant researcher in the debriefing discussion include the following:

In one of the groups, there were two visible minority students present. As the students were answering questions regarding factors that have influenced their career direction, one of these students asked the other whether her minority status is a factor that makes a difference for her. The student replied that yes, she thinks that it makes a big difference which has a negative impact. The first student then responded that it hasn't made a difference for herself. The researcher and assistant researcher had both been surprised that the first student would introduce this issue and ask what might be a somewhat leading question directly to one other participant. It was unusual across groups that participants would ask each other questions. The students were often interested in further discussion of particular topics and any questions from participants would come from an individual stating her own opinion and extending a general sense of curiosity to the rest of the group.

In another example from a debriefing discussion, one of the participants expressed her fear of becoming a secretary. She stated that she has felt internal pressure in the past to obtain a teaching certificate so that she does not get labeled as a "secretary". Although this participant would be graduating with a degree in International Relations, she went on to talk about her past experiences with "pink collar" jobs and being concerned that she could become stuck in this role. She also later stated that after graduation, she cannot imagine herself earning as much money as her male friend who has graduated. In the debriefing discussion, the researcher and assistant researcher expressed curiosity about the role of this individual's gender concerning the issues of underemployment and rates

of pay. It is interesting that the occupations of secretary and teacher both tend to be traditional "female" occupations but the role of "teacher" tends to reflect higher prestige, requires more education, and provides higher rates of pay as compared generally to secretarial roles.

A third example from a debriefing conversation includes the observation of a participants' experience with the metaphor of graduation. She expressed that the process of drawing the metaphor had been very helpful because she had thought she was worried about graduation and after drawing the metaphor, she felt optimistic (see metaphor D on page 87). The researcher and assistant researcher viewed the metaphor and wondered about the strong, positive impact that it appeared to have for the participant. It would seem that this served as a helpful tool to crystallize her optimism about the future as well as being a tool of data collection.

Another point of curiosity that was discussed between the researcher and assistant researcher focused on participants' perceptions that gender does not play a role in their career direction. The researcher and assistant researcher compared their personal experiences of gender as influencing career and wondered whether additional life experience might cause this view to shift for participants. This question reflects the researcher and assistant researchers' personal biases that the participants are influenced by gender and that some of them are presently unaware of the influence. It was important to be aware of these kinds of personal assumptions and to be able to put them aside while conducting the focus groups as well as during the analysis process.

As the study progressed, the researcher and assistant researcher incorporated discussion of the summaries across groups within the debriefing meeting. Some themes

began to emerge across groups. For example, one theme that began to emerge was the participants' perceptions that there were dramatic differences between their own career paths and the career paths of their mothers. A second example included the participants' perceptions that they had made few compromises in their career paths thus far. Another theme that began to emerge was the high level of confidence expressed by participants as a group.

Qualitative Analysis

The analysis of data included the procedure outlined by Kreuger (1998c). Kreuger reviews the systematic process of analysis that enables the researcher to challenge her own assumptions while engaged in the iterative process of qualitative research. Kreuger depicts the process of qualitative inquiry through a metaphor, "beginning the analysis is like standing at the entrance of a maze. Several different paths are readily apparent at the beginning, and as you continue, additional paths and choices emerge." (p. 8).

Along with Kreuger's (1998c) procedure in guiding the analysis process, other methods of qualitative analysis were also consulted to further enhance analysis of the data. Janesick (1994) cautions qualitative researchers about "methodolatry, a combination of method and idolatry, to describe a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told." She adds, "it is always tempting to become over involved with the method, and, in so doing, separate experience from knowing." (p. 215).

In addition to literature referring to focus group design and analysis, the present research was also informed by ideas from other qualitative sources such as ethnographic research (Aunger, 1995; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982), the critical incident technique

(Woolsey, 1986), grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), action research (Young, Antal, Bassett, Post, Seigo, & Valach, 1998), narrative research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), co-operative inquiry (Reason & Heron, 1995), and general considerations for conducting qualitative research (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Janesick, 1994; Krefting, 1991; Lee, Mitchell, & Sablynski, 1999; Richardson, 1994; Smith, 1989a; Smith 1989b; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; and Vidich & Lyman, 1994).

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative and quantitative research have evolved from different traditions, and therefore, evaluative criteria are unique to each tradition (Krefting, 1991). Guba (1981) outlines a model for evaluating the trustworthiness of research including consideration of truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

Truth value refers to the researchers' confidence regarding the truth of the findings relating to the chosen research design, participants, and the context. Applicability relates to the idea of generalizing to other populations. Considering that generalizability is typically not a goal of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that applicability in qualitative inquiry relates to the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient descriptive data in order that comparisons can be made. Consistency refers to the consistency of findings if the research were conducted with participants in a similar context or replicated with the same participants. Guba's (1981) description of consistency in qualitative research refers to expected variability that can be tracked and ascribed to specific sources. Therefore, atypical data can be included in the findings along with normative data. Neutrality refers to freedom from bias. Lincoln and Guba

(1985) suggest that the term dependability should be the criterion for neutrality in qualitative research with the focus of neutrality on the data rather than the researcher.

Huberman and Miles (1994) encourage "transparency" in the clear and explicit reporting of qualitative procedures in order that, "a.) The reader will be confident of, and can verify, reported conclusions; b.) Secondary analysis of the data is possible; c.) The study could in principle be replicated; and d.) Fraud or misconduct, if it exists, will be more trackable." (p. 439).

Triangulation and reflexivity enhance the rigor of qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). Triangulation refers to the use of convergent sources of methods or data (Janesick, 1994; Krefting, 1991). Denzin (1978) identifies four means of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Triangulation can be achieved by utilizing various data sources, investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives or multiple methods.

Reflexivity involves the researchers' continual assessment of personal perceptions and experiences that may influence the research process (Aunger, 1995; Krefting, 1991). Reflexivity assists the researcher to sharpen his or her own awareness of personal values and how these may influence interaction with the data, and subsequently, the research findings. Researchers hold to varying views regarding objectivity in research and the relationships between theories, facts, and values (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Smith, 1989). In the present study, one of the underlying beliefs of the researcher is that theories, facts, and values are interdependent and it is not possible to be purely objective or to completely isolate facts from values. Therefore, reflexivity throughout the research process is an important component to assuring the quality of the research findings.

Transparency of Data Analysis

In order to ensure the transparency of the research findings, the method and analysis procedures are described in detail. In the following chapter describing results, care has been taken to provide information relating to both the analysis of each focus group question individually as well as the analysis of the data across questions. The data have been presented in a way that the reader may experience the unfolding story of the data as they develop into themes.

Triangulation

Triangulation, or the convergence of different sources of methods or data (Janesick, 1994; Krefting, 1991), was achieved by various means attending to the four types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and method.

In data triangulation, the sources of data utilized included; the pre-group questionnaire, focus group questions, end-of-group reflection questions, the use of creative expression by inviting participants to draw a metaphor, written notes taken during the debriefing process between the researcher and assistant researcher, and field notes taken throughout data collection and analysis.

Regarding investigator triangulation, three assistant researchers participated in the data collection procedure. Assistant researchers recorded data in the focus group sessions, participated in constructing a summary of themes at the end of the group, and participated in the debriefing process immediately after the group. The assistant researchers who participated in more than one group contributed their perceptions of comparison across groups. In addition, an independent rater was involved in sorting individual statements according to the themes that emerged from the data.

Regarding theory triangulation, the present study is an exploratory study where effort was made on the part of the researcher to put current theories of women's career development aside and to listen, as much as is possible, without preconceived notions or expectations. During the analysis and writing stage, theoretical triangulation is used to interpret and understand the research data in light of existing theories.

In methodological triangulation, other qualitative methods were consulted in addition to the focus group literature. In qualitative methodology, there is consistency regarding many of the underlying purposes and principles guiding the process of inquiry. The focus group literature is well developed in its attention to group design, formulation of questions, and procedural details regarding group facilitation. One critique of the focus group literature is that the guidelines for analysis are not as well developed as some qualitative methods such as grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986), for example. However, the focus group procedure has a lengthy history as a data collection method in both the social sciences and market research (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992; Gray-Vickrey, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). It provides a unique tool for the researcher due to its group format, which is different from most other qualitative research designs. Kreuger (1994) summarizes that the basic principle is to look for trends and patterns that are occurring across groups. Morgan (1988) encourages researchers to draw on information from other qualitative methods when utilizing focus group design.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in this study was an ongoing process beginning at the early stages with the formulation of the questions guiding the inquiry and continuing throughout the

research project. After each focus group session, the researcher met with the research assistant to discuss the themes and process of the group, as well as to consider personal reflections such as assumptions, expectations, and surprises regarding the content of the data. The researcher also kept a journal of field notes.

Truth Value

There were various considerations leading to confidence in the truth of the findings relating to the chosen research design, participants, and the context.

The focus group design was chosen for its suitability in the inquiry of the process of women's career development. The focus group format was also noted to have unique features of attaining group synergy (Gray-Vickrey, 1993), which allows participants to comment and add to the statements of others in the group. Gray-Vickrey (1993) highlights the depth of information that can be obtained through this synergy, which differs from information obtained during individual interviews.

The participants were characterized by some homogenous factors, which is an important component of the focus group design (Knodel, 1993; Krueger, 1994; Merton, Fiske, and Kendall, 1990; Morrison, 1998). They were all female arts students within two years of completing an arts degree. Therefore, the findings may have applicability for others sharing these descriptors.

The context includes various considerations. First of all, the focus groups were conducted approximately two to three months before graduation. Since post-secondary students often lack both motivation and preparation for career-decision making until the final stages of their programs (Crozier & Grassick, 1996; Schlossberg et al., 1989), this time period would appear to be an ideal opportunity to focus on issues of career decision-

making. However, this developmental guideline may vary across students. In this study, the original advertisement stated specifically fourth year students and many phone calls were received from students at various stages of degree completion. Due to the amount of interest from third year students and the similarity of concerns compared with graduating students, the decision was made to include them in the study.

Another consideration relating to the context of the study includes the facilitation of each focus group with attention to setting appropriate norms, such as confidentiality, to increase the comfort level of participants.

Applicability

Applicability relates to the generalizability of quantitative research. However, in the context of qualitative inquiry, the focus is on the provision of sufficient descriptive data in order that comparisons can be made (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, demographic information is provided regarding cultural background, age, parental occupations, area of study, and birth order.

There are also several considerations relating to the context that must be taken into account when considering applicability to other populations. These include participants' developmental stage of university to work transition, pursuit of a Bachelor of Arts degree, attendance at the University of British Columbia, and residing within Canada's social structure and ideology. The findings may have relevance to other populations and the reader is encouraged to consider applicability based on the demographics and context of this group of 21 female arts students.

Consistency/ Variability

Consistency refers to replication of findings and according to Guba (1981), qualitative inquiry needs to be concerned with tracking the expected variability and including atypical data along with normative data. In this study, the data collection process as well as analysis and reporting of the findings is included in sufficient detail so that the study can be replicated with another group. Atypical findings are also reported.

Neutrality/Dependability

Neutrality relates to the freedom from bias. The idea of dependability is suggested as more appropriate for qualitative inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) with the focus of neutrality on the data rather than the researcher. Through the continual process of reflexivity, the dependability of the inquiry process was increased. Dependability was also enhanced through the attention to truth value and applicability.

Analysis of Data

The data was taken from flip chart paper form and word-processed. A color-coding method was utilized to track statements according to individual groups. The statements were initially sorted across groups, focusing on one question at a time and constructing themes within the parameters of a single focus group question. Each question was analyzed individually for themes.

Secondly, the themes were analyzed across questions according to the four questions guiding the research process. In this stage, the following data were added from the pre-group questionnaire: participants' definitions of career success, excluded occupational options, and graduation concerns. Additionally, the two reflection questions were also added to the analysis process.

Thirdly, the analysis relating to individual focus group questions was synthesized with the analysis of the data according to the four questions guiding the research to result in the overall themes.

All three levels of analysis have been included in the results section to enhance the transparency of the analysis process. Huberman and Miles (1994) highlight the importance of transparency in research. Additionally, each of the twenty-one metaphors drawn to depict participants' experiences of graduation has been included.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This focus group study sought to investigate the process of career decision-making for 21 female students graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree. The inquiry was guided by a primary question and three secondary questions included below:

1. What is the process by which women graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree make choices regarding their career paths?

2. What compromises are made?

3. What is their perception of the effect of gender on these choices?

4. What is their level of confidence regarding the ability to achieve career goals?

The process of analysis included analysis according to individual focus group questions across groups as well as the consideration of themes across focus group questions.

There were a total of 485 statements elicited from participants in response to focus group questions across all six groups. In addition, the participants provided written responses to questions on the pre-group questionnaire. Some of the questions on the pre-group questionnaire were identical to the focus group questions and the purpose of these was to encourage participants to focus on the topic prior to group discussion. Some of the questions on the pre-group questionnaire focused on obtaining information in addition to that obtained in the focus group. The analysis also included individual written responses at the close of each group responding to questions about the learning and the experiences of group members. Finally, each participant provided a drawing of a

metaphor that depicts her experience of graduation. Kreuger (1998c), Amundson (1996), and Combs & Freedman (1990) comment on the value of metaphors.

The analysis process formally began with focusing on themes according to individual focus group questions. Secondly, the researcher focused on the four research questions guiding the inquiry process. Thirdly, overall themes were constructed from the research data. These are listed and described according to the same order that the analysis was conducted.

The themes according to individual focus group questions are provided along with information regarding the number of statements belonging in each category. Tables are also provided as well as the representation percentage of individual statements forming the specific theme as compared to the sum of statements for the particular question. In some of the questions, the primary themes have been described in greater detail than those categories of statements that contained a much smaller number of items. For example, the analysis of Question #1 resulted in three primary themes. However, the decision was made by the researcher to include the three additional categories, although they each represented substantially fewer statements than the primary themes. All the statements were considered to be valuable and even data that represents one participant out of 21 is worthy of further consideration. Tables have been provided and care was taken, where possible, to display the themes in descending order from the most representative to the least representative according to the statements provided.

Themes according to individual focus group questions

Question #1 Decision to Pursue a B.A.

Focus group questions:

1a. Why did you choose to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree?

1b. Was it planned before you started post-secondary or did you decide during your post-secondary experience?

Thirteen of the participants had decided to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree previous to beginning post-secondary education and eight participants decided during their post-secondary training. Of the 35 statements given for choosing a Bachelor of Arts degree, the main three reasons related to 1. Interests (14 statements, 40% representation), 2. Ability (8 statements, 23% representation), and 3. Attaining occupational goals (7 statements, 20% representation). The remaining six statements reflected 4. Good fit with personality (3 statements), 5. Familiarity and comfort level (2 statements), and 6. Family expectations (1 statement). See Table 3.

Interests were stated mostly in terms of directing occupational goals towards interests. For example, some participants expressed interests in the areas of journalism, working with people, and arts courses. In contrast, ability tended to be framed both in terms of heading toward the direction of perceived ability and steering away from perceived lack of ability. For example, statements from this category include, "I chose arts over sciences based on my abilities." and "My ability in math was not high." The third category of attaining occupational goals included a variety of personal goals linked to the attainment of a B.A. such as, "I needed a B.A. to get into graduate school," and "I need a degree to increase marketability."

Table 3

Reasons for Pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree

Reasons	# of statements	Representation
Interests	14	40%
Ability	8	23%
Attaining occupational goals	7	20%
Good fit with personality	3	9%
Familiarity and comfort level	2	6%
Family expectations	1	3%

Question #2 Career Possibilities

Focus group question:

2. What are your career plans and possibilities?

The participants demonstrated a variety of occupational interests. See Table 4 for information regarding career options. Most of the students had not made a clear occupational choice but rather, they were considering several possibilities. These included 69 options for an average of 3.3 options per student. The career possibilities were grouped into the following broad categories: 1. Counselling/ Social Work/ Health, 2. International Development/ Tourism/ Translating, 3. Education, 4. Law/ Corrections/ Advocacy, 5. Writing/ Publishing/ Journalism, 6. Public Relations/ Advertising, 7. Human Resources/ Business, 8. Computers/ High Technology, 9. Graduate Training/ Professional School, and 10. Art. In addition to options included in these broad categories, one participant stated that she would like "to take a year off" and another stated that she would like "to be a mom".

There are two categories that require further explanation. Category two, International Development, Tourism, and Translating, was mentioned often across most of the groups. Some possible reasons for the popularity of this category include the

diversity of the cultural backgrounds of the participants, the diversity of cultural influences within the university, and the influence of globalization.

The second category to note is category eight, Computers and High Technology. Although participants named fields such as e-business and web design as possible areas to pursue, these options seemed to be based primarily on the perception of labour market demands rather than interest or other factors. One participant commented that noticing the constant advertising for computer technology skills training has influenced her to consider this area. Another participant considered obtaining technical skills as a vehicle to help achieve her goal of doing humanitarian work in underdeveloped countries.

Table 4
Career Options

Career Options	# of times mentioned
Counselling/ Social Work/ Health	13
International Development/ Tourism/ Translating	10
Education	9
Law/ Corrections/ Advocacy	7
Writing/ Publishing/ Journalism	6
Public Relations/ Advertising	6
Human Resources/ Business	6
Computers/ High Technology	5
Graduate Training/ Professional School	3
Art	2
Take a year off	1
Be a mom	1

Question #3 Factors and Influences

Focus group questions:

3. What factors or influences are involved in your career decision?

    a. Past?

    b. Present?

3. What factors or influences are involved in your career decision?

c. Future?

<u>Past Factors</u>

There were a total of 52 factors stated as past influences. For the first focus group, the original question used the word "factors" and participants expressed that they were unclear about examples of "factors". The researcher did not want to provide examples, thereby potentially circumscribing responses. Therefore, the word "influences" was adopted and utilized interchangeably with "factors". See Table 5 for past factors/ influences. There were two primary categories across groups. These included 1. Values (19 statements, 37% representation). and 2. Family (15 statements, 29% representation). The first category included participants' values that had been important influences in past career considerations. Many of the values that were mentioned for past influences were also mentioned relating to present and future influences. Some examples of values that had influenced past career goals included "earning a good income", "helping others", "excitement", and "saving the world". The second category consisted of a variety of ways that the participants' family of origin as well as extended family had shaped her career direction including offering encouragement and guidance, responding to parental expectations, and observing the work roles of family members. Examples of statements in this category included, "My sister and auntie are working in PR and doing well" and "Everyone in my family has a degree."

There were several other categories of past influences, which are composed of significantly fewer statements than the two primary categories. These include: 3. Interests (6 statements, 12% representation), 4. Impressions/ Assumptions/ Idealism (4 statements,

8% representation), 5. Ability (4 statements, 8% representation), 6. Past experiences (2

statements, 4% representation), 7. Encouragement of others (1 statement, 2%

representation), and 8. Attention to labour market demands (1 statement, 2%

representation).

An interesting finding of the research is that although the first category of family

influences is a strong category for past factors, it is not mentioned at all in considering

present and future factors. A possible reason for this difference is the developmental

nature of student growth and the subsequent changes in their career decision-making

process. Although the participants' family of origin is no longer mentioned as present

and future influences, there is a noticeable shift to considering the influence of future

partners and children for many of the students.

Table 5
Past Factors/ Influences

Past Factors/ Influences	# of statements	Representation
Values	19	37%
Family	15	29%
Interests	6	12%
Impressions/ Assumptions/ Idealism	4	8%
Ability	4	8%
Past experiences	2	4%
Encouragement of others	1	2%
Attention to labour market demands	1	2%

Present Factors

There were a total of 47 factors stated as present influences. See Table 6 for

present factors/ influences. The majority of these consisted of Values (27 value

statements, 57% representation). The students demonstrated a wide diversity of values

including: Financial security (8 statements, 17% representation), Personal satisfaction (7

statements, 15% representation), Social interaction (4 statements, 9% representation), Making a contribution (3 statements, 6% representation), Intellectual challenge (2 statement, 4% representation), Independence (1 statement, 2% representation), Creativity (1 statement, 2% representation), and Taking risks (1 statement, 2% representation).

In addition to values, participants also mentioned the desire to incorporate: Interests (8 statements, 17% representation), and Current or future skills and abilities (7 statements, 15% representation). Students also mentioned factors related to the Process of career decision-making (5 statements, 11% representation). This last category included statements such as "the freedom to explore" and "considering all the possibilities".

Considering values, financial security appeared to be particularly salient for present considerations. One possible reason for its importance includes concerns about paying back student loans. This issue was mentioned as a stressor by several students across groups. It had also been mentioned as a graduation concern on the pre-group questionnaire. Students commented on the reality of making rent payments and paying bills after graduation yet, wondering about the means to meet financial obligations. Considering that most of the participants were in the traditional student category in relation to age, the concern about finances may be a developmental consideration relating to becoming financially independent.

Table 6
Present Factors/ Influences

Present Factors/ Influences	# of statements	Representation
Values:	27 (* included below)	57%
Financial Security	*8	17%
Personal Satisfaction	*7	15%
Social Interaction	*4	9%
Making a Contribution	*3	6%
Intellectual Challenge	*2	4%
Independence	*1	2%
Creativity	*1	2%
Taking risks	*1	2%
Interests	8	17%
Current or future skills and abilities	7	15%
Process of career decision-making	5	11%

Future Factors

The participants provided 47 statements for future factors and many of these were similar to present factors. See Table 6 for future factors/ influences. Again, participants' Values were the primary influences on future career considerations (28 statements, 60% representation). Values included: Personal satisfaction (9 statements, 19% representation), Financial security (8 statements, 17 % representation), Making a contribution (3 statements, 6% representation), Intellectual challenge/ Growth (3 statements, 6% representation), Social interaction (1 statement, 2% representation), Autonomy (1 statement, 2% representation), Status (1 statement, 2% representation), Stability (1 statement, 2% representation), and Time off (1 statement, 2% representation). There were some changes in the values mentioned between the present and future considerations, but generally, there was consistency. As for the present considerations, some participants expressed a desire to, Utilize present or future skills and abilities (4 statements, 9% representation), and Incorporate interests (2 statements, 4%

representation). Career decision-making considerations were also included (2 statements, 4% representation).

An area that emerged as unique to future influences was, Desire to balance the interests of present or future partners and/ or future children (7 statements, 15% representation). There were also several participants who clearly stated that they have decided not to have children.

Two additional areas provided for future factors were; Consideration of geography/location (2 statements, 4% representation), and Opportunity for travel (2 statements, 4% representation).

Table 7
Future Factors/ Influences

Future Factors/ Influences	# of statements	Representation
Values:	28 (*included below)	60%
Personal Satisfaction	*9	19%
Financial Security	*8	17%
Making a Contribution	*3	6%
Intellectual challenge/ Growth	*3	6%
Social interaction	*1	2%
Autonomy	*1	2%
Status	*1	2%
Stability	*1	2%
Time off	*1	2%
Desire to balance the interests of present or future partners and/ or future children	7	15%
Utilize present or future skills and abilities	4	9%
Interests	2	4%
Career decision-making considerations	2	4%
Consideration of geography/location	2	4%
Opportunity for travel	2	4%

Summary of Past, Present, and Future Factors

Generally, the influences of the past, present, and future appear to depict a developmental process in the career decision-making of the participants. Students name the strong influence of their values, which change and shift somewhat from past to present and future. The students' families of origin appear to be a very important influence in the past and there is an emerging influence of future partners and children for some participants. Impressions, assumptions, and idealism regarding the world of work are stated as influences of the past but not the present and future. Perhaps this demonstrates the growth of knowledge for participants regarding themselves and their acquired knowledge regarding occupational possibilities. The diversity of values reported for the present and future compared with significantly fewer value statements for the past would also lend support to participants' emerging self-awareness.

Question #4 Compromise

Focus group questions:

4a. Have you made compromises/ do you plan to make compromises in deciding on career direction?

b. What are these areas of compromise?

Of the 50 statements that were provided in response to the idea of compromise, only 11 statements related to past compromise with the remaining 39 statements referring to future compromise.

Participants demonstrated the perception that they had made small compromises in the past or none at all. Six students provided examples of past compromise which related to past work experiences or educational decisions. Five participants stated that

they had not made any compromises, and the remainder expressed uncertainty about past compromise.

The majority of statements were directed toward the future. Two future areas of compromise emerged as salient considerations for participants across groups. These two included 1. Relationships versus occupational goals (15 statements, 38% representation), and 2. Money versus job satisfaction (14 statements, 36% representation). See Table 8.

The first category, Relationships versus occupational goals, is defined as the consideration of blending the interests of present or future partners and/or future children with the desire to attain occupational goals. For example, one participant stated that she had decided to postpone graduate school in order to spend more time with her boyfriend and travel. Another participant stated that although she would like to become a Naturopath, she was currently considering other occupational options that might fit with her desire to have children. She stated, "Family and children come first."

The second category, Money versus job satisfaction, is defined as the consideration of earnings balanced with the desire for job satisfaction in terms of incorporating personal interests and values.

In addition to these two categories of compromise, participants also commented on 3. Desire to accumulate experience and having to sacrifice job satisfaction temporarily (6 statements, 15% representation). For example, one participant commented, "I'll be a yes man or an apprentice or assistant if it's a good project." Another category consisted of 4. Sacrificing location for either money, relationships, or job satisfaction (4 statements, 10% representation). For example, one participant stated

that she was apprehensive about asking her partner to relocate in order to achieve her desire to work internationally.

Several of the participants appeared to have difficulty articulating areas of compromise for the future. These students either expressed that they did not know the kinds of compromises that would be made or added a very tentative "maybe" in articulating possible areas of compromise.

Table 8
Future Compromise

Type of Compromise	# of statements	Representation
Relationships versus occupational goals	15	38%
Money versus job satisfaction	14	36%
Desire to accumulate experience and having to sacrifice job satisfaction temporarily	6	15%
Sacrificing location for either money, relationships, or job satisfaction	4	10%

Question #5 Confidence Levels

Focus group questions:

5. What is your confidence level in your ability to achieve career goals?

a. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=low, 10=high)

b. Considering the history of your confidence levels, what have been the causes of increasing confidence?

c. What have been the causes of decreasing confidence?

d. What role will your confidence level play in your career goals?

There were several secondary questions related to confidence levels. Firstly, participants were asked to rate their confidence level on a scale of one to ten (one=low confidence, ten=high confidence). Across groups, confidence levels were high and

ranged from five to ten. The mean for all participants was 7.6 with a standard deviation of 1.5.

Secondly, students were asked about the history of their confidence levels and causes of increase or decrease in confidence. 23 statements were provided for the causes of increasing confidence and 13 statements were provided for the causes of decreasing confidence. The three main areas that caused an increase in confidence levels are: 1. Work experience/ Life experience (11 statements, 48% representation), 2. Positive feedback/ Encouragement from others (5 statements, 22% representation), and 3. Clear direction/ Focused goals (4 statements, 17% representation). See Table 9.

The first category included noticing a sense of enjoyment in work situations, noting personal success in work tasks as well as an increasing awareness of abilities. The second category included the encouragement of friends, family, employers, and instructors. The third category included the emergence of a clear sense of direction and establishing personal goals.

In addition, the remaining statements referred to 4. Increased optimism (2 statements, 9% representation), and 5. Educational attainment (1 statement, 4% representation).

The causes of decreasing confidence were more varied and included a diversity of responses referring to concerns about competition with others in the work force, concerns about the value of an arts degree, discouragement due the job search process, low motivation, unclear career goals and concerns about grades or achievements. For example, one participant stated that her confidence has gone down due to media information about the "glass ceiling" for women and the "glass elevator" for men.

Another student stated that she thought that employers might view her philosophy major as an "unpractical area" of study.

The students were also asked about the role that they perceive their confidence level to play in their overall career goals. Of the 29 statements provided, 24 of them referred to the opinion that confidence level was directly related to career goals. The participants provided various reasons for the importance of high confidence levels in attaining career goals. For example, some ideas included the perception that confidence has an important role to play in social interaction, motivation and both goal setting as well as goal attainment. Two participants noted that low confidence levels can also be beneficial in attaining career goals because "with low confidence, you work harder".

Table 9
Causes of Increasing Confidence

Causes of Increase	# of statements	Representation
Work experience/ Life experience	11	48%
Positive feedback/ Encouragement from others	5	22%
Clear direction/ Focused goals	4	17%
Increased optimism	2	9%
Educational attainment	1	4%

Question #6 Comparison with Mother's Experience

Focus group question:

6. How do you think your career opportunities and your career decision-making process compare to your mother's experiences?

This question generated the most data in terms of providing examples and stories that supported participants' responses. 41 statements were provided in the comparison of participants with their mothers relating to both career opportunities and the career

decision-making process. Two categories emerged including: 1. More opportunities and choices in comparison with mother; both in education and occupations (23 statements, 56% representation), and 2. Changes in societies' values and gender expectations in comparison with mother's experience (16 statements, 39% representation).

In considering the first category, it was observed that the words "choices" and "opportunities" were repeated frequently across groups. For example, "I'm luckier, I have greater opportunities at a younger age" and, "She was in commerce and dropped out because it was more of a priority for her brother to go to university. I have more opportunity and choice." Several of the students stated that their mothers were pursuing new opportunities later in life. For example, "There's a night and day difference between me and my mother. I could do whatever I want, not just teaching or mothering. She's modeling after me now and even experimenting with business and stocks."

The second category included considerations of the ways in which society has changed such as, "I have better options than my mother. I am less restricted by society. Her parents gave her two choices: teacher or nurse" and, "Mom's choices are channeled by society's expectations. I'm doing things my mom can't understand." Several of the participants mentioned that they don't feel the pressure to get married and have children at a young age as their mothers did.

Although the majority of the participants expressed perceptions of optimistic change for themselves compared with their mothers, two of the students provided alternate views. The first highlighted the similarities, rather than differences, between herself and her mother. The second student stated that she felt that she had less opportunity than her mother at the same age, "She graduated in the 60's in Hong Kong

where there were lots of jobs. There's no guarantee of jobs now. Technology has replaced people."

In summary, the participants generally displayed a sense of optimism in their perceptions of the positive changes in society and enhanced career opportunities.

Question #7 Impact of Gender

Focus group question:

7. How do you think being a woman influences and impacts your career direction?

There were 39 statements that were provided regarding participants' perceptions of the influence of gender. A variety of differing ideas were presented.

One of the four themes that emerged from this question included: 1. Being a woman doesn't influence career decisions (12 statements, 31% representation). The other three themes reflected the sense that being a woman does influence career in the following ways: 2. Sense of being undervalued as compared with men/ Noting gender differences in wages, interests, or occupations (13 statements, 33% representation), 3. Balancing work and family/ Choosing family friendly options (9 statements, 23% representation), and 4. Interest in creating change regarding women's issues (5 statements, 13% representation). See Table 10.

Twelve of the participants felt that gender does not influence their career directions. Some of the students thought that there was a link between gender and career direction, but they expressed a sense of ambivalence and uncertainty about the extent of the effect. For example, one participant tentatively commented, "I think that in the higher levels there is some gender discrimination."

The first category where women described the gender impact was category 2. Sense of being undervalued as compared with men/ Noting gender differences in wages, interests, or occupations. For example, one participant stated, "There is a pressure to do masculine things more than feminine things. Feminine qualities are undervalued and under-recognized." A second student commented, "Being a woman completely influences career direction. More women are in arts and more men are in sciences. I was streamlined into arts from a young age."

The third theme was 3. Balancing work and family/ Choosing family friendly options. There were various ideas presented relating to the balance of occupation and family. For example, one participant stated, "I chose my first career with the idea of having children. I chose an occupation that was family friendly. Now I will not be having a family." Another participant spoke about her recent consideration of "family interests and how to balance these with work." A third participant reported, "I don't have to balance children and career. It's ok for a woman to work or to stay at home and raise children. It's not as acceptable for a man to choose to stay at home and raise children."

The fourth theme included 4. Interest in creating change regarding women's issues. One of the participants stated, "I'm very aware of the impact. Top positions are held by men. This motivates me to become an educator and have the chance to influence children, to help improve equality and options for women." A second student reported, "I tend to reject and challenge traditional expectations for women."

Table 10

Influence/ Impact of Gender

How gender influences	# of statements	Representation
Sense of being undervalued as compared with men/ Noting gender differences in wages, interests, or occupations	13	33%
Being a woman doesn't influence career decisions	12	31%
Balancing work and family/ Choosing family friendly options	9	23%
Interest in creating change regarding women's issues	5	13%

Question #8 Graduation Transition Metaphor

Focus group question:

8. How would you describe your experience of the graduation transition using a

metaphor?

Participants were asked to think about a metaphor for the graduation transition

and they were invited to draw this metaphor. They were asked to present the drawing to

the others in the group and briefly describe the metaphor. In addition, they were asked

about the kinds of feelings that are associated with the drawing. Kreuger encourages the

use of metaphors in focus groups in order to facilitate understanding (Kreuger, 1998c,

p. 14).

The affective words provided by participants were grouped into categories, which

included the following broad affective states: 1. Fear & concern, 2. Excitement,

3. Freedom, 4. Happiness, and 5. Hope. Participants reported a total of 35 affective

words associated with their drawings. Several participants reported a mixture of feelings

associated with the artwork such as experiencing both excitement and fear. Table 11

provides the affective words used by participants.

Table 11
Affective words associated with metaphors

| Affective categories	Affective words used by participants	Number of participants
Fear & Concern	Fear Trepidation Terrifying Concern Uncertainty Loneliness Frustration Obligation	11
Excitement	Excitement Anticipation Exhilarating	9
Freedom	Freedom Liberation Unfurlment & Expansion	7
Happiness	Happiness Pleasant, Tranquility, Sublime Confident & Comfortable	5
Hope	Hope Optimistic Growth	3

Themes emerging from the art work:

There were various themes that emerged across groups. The artwork of each

participant has been provided below. The most common ideas expressed through art

included the idea of being in transit on a journey, experiencing a sense of freedom, and

being aware of future choices and options. The affect associated with each drawing as

articulated by participants has been noted. In addition, some students offered further

explanation or comments in describing their artwork. The metaphors have been labeled

with a letter for the purpose of identification.
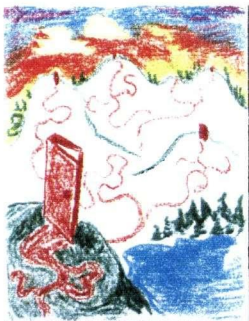
In transit on a journey:
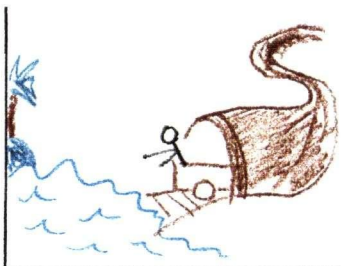
Emerging from a tunnel and diving into the ocean. (A)
This participant added an island to her picture as she heard
others in the group describe their pictures. She stated, "I will
swim and look for an island that is suitable."
Affect associated with the drawing:
"freedom and obligation"
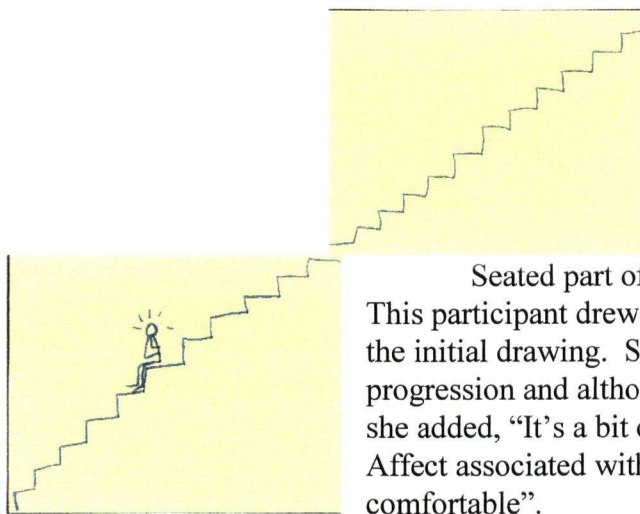
Seated part of the way up a set of stairs. (B)
This participant drew a continuation of stairs after completing
the initial drawing. She stated that she felt the upward
progression and although she was seated in a "comfy place",
she added, "It's a bit of a struggle relaxing there."
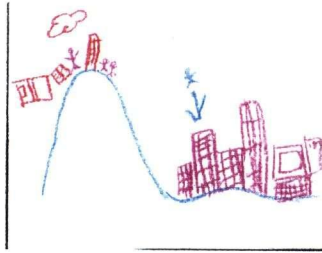Affect associated with the drawing: "confident and
comfortable".

A movie star on the way to a movie premiere with paparazzi
snapping photos. (C) This participant stated, "What lies
beyond the red carpet is unknown."
Affect associated with the drawing: "fear".

Many winding paths. (D)
Affect associated with the drawing: "pleasant, tranquility,
sublime".

In transit on a journey (continued):

The journey from university to the work world. (E)
Affect associated with the drawing: "fear".

This participant talked about being on a "boogie
board". (F)
Affect associated with the drawing: "terrifying,
exhilarating, excitement."
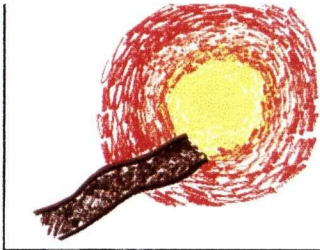
Affect associated with the drawing: "excitement and
anticipation". (G)

A new beginning. (H)
Affect associated with the drawing: "excitement and
anticipation".

Affect associated with the drawing: "happy and hopeful". (I)

<u>Freedom:</u>
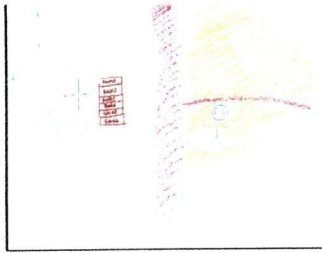
Being set free from chains. (J)
    Affect associated with the drawing: "freedom".

Affect associated with the drawing: "freedom and liberation". (K)
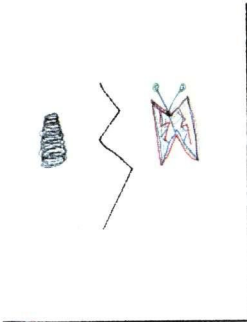
Cocoon and butterfly. (L)
Affect associated with the drawing: "freedom".
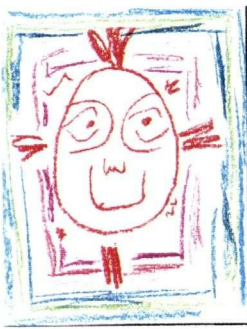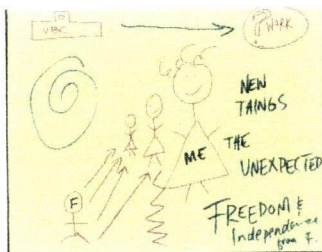

Affect associated with the drawing: "unfurlment and expansion". (M)

Future choices and opportunities:
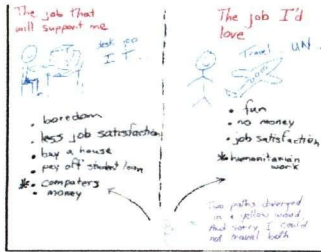
Affect associated with the drawing: "excited, concerned, unsure." (N)
As this participant spoke about her drawing, she expressed the possibility of melding the two choices rather than having to decide on one or the other.
Her picture and subsequent consideration of the picture demonstrates the dynamic nature of the career decision-making process.
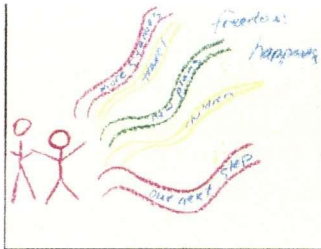
Affect associated with the drawing: "freedom and happiness". (O)
Some of the possibilities articulated in the drawing include "more studies, travel, new plans, children, our next step."
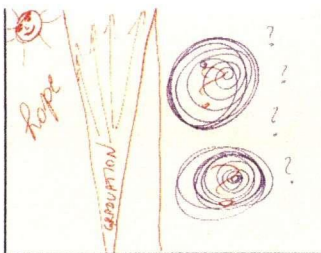
Affect associated with the drawing: "hope, uncertainty, happiness, fear of future, questioning." (P)
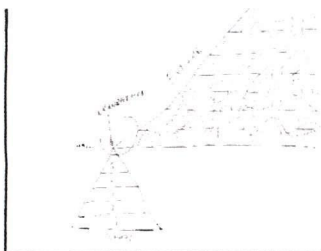
Affect associated with the drawing: "trepidation". (Q)
This participant stated that the point of graduation seems as though she is "starting over". She expressed, "I can't wait to get out of here!" and "Yahoo! I did it!"

Additional Considerations:

Loneliness and Frustration:
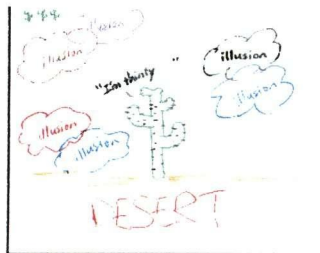
This participant spoke about being in the desert and being surounded by mirages and illusions. She added that there were three cacti in the top left corner of the page, which are "other women to connect with in the future". (R)
Affect associated with the drawing: "loneliness".
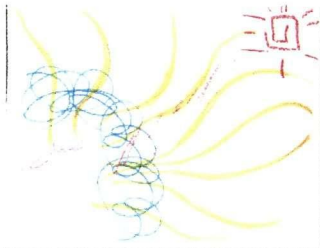
Affect associated with the drawing: "frustration". (S)

Optimism:
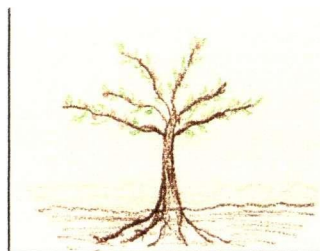
Affect associated with the drawing: "optimistic growth". (T)
This participant spoke about enjoying the academic experience and feeling that "the spring leaves are ready to develop and its time to connect with other trees."
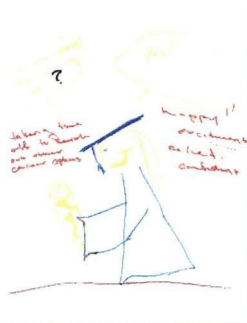
Affect associated with the drawing: "excitement". (U)
This participant wrote on her drawing "happy, excitement, relief, confident" and "taking time off to search out other career options".

Movement Orientation of Metaphors

The metaphors were reviewed for the amount of action present in the drawings. Two participants demonstrated a high degree of activity within the drawing while four metaphors demonstrated the idea of pausing before pursuing further action.

Very Active:

Some metaphors show a high level of activity, such as metaphor F which demonstrates being on a "boogie board". Metaphor A demonstrates diving into the water with the intention of swimming to an island.

Pausing:

Metaphor B demonstrates the participant seated on the stairs with the idea that the person is pausing from activity that has taken place in the past (climbing to the present point) and will also take place in the future (climbing further). Similarly, Metaphor I depicts the participant standing on a flat portion of a hill that both ascends and descends. Metaphor N depicts the participant paused while entertaining two options. This metaphor notes a pause in terms of pursuing one choice or the other. Yet, there is also a very active process that is taking place in terms of considering the two options. Metaphor O appears to demonstrate the idea of pausing with potential future options noted in the drawing.

Compartmentalization

The metaphors were reviewed for the continuity or the separation of the drawings into parts. Some metaphors demonstrated clear separations such as a line drawn down the middle of a page and others demonstrate more implicit separations.

Separation

Several of the metaphors were separated by an actual line drawn down the middle of the page such as metaphor J, L, and N, and P. Within these three metaphors is a reflection of opposites such as the cocoon and the butterfly in metaphor L and the participant being chained and set free from chains in metaphor J.

There are also other themes of opposites, separation, and transition points without an actual line drawn down a page. For example, metaphor D depicts a door that is barely ajar and yet it is not connected to a tangible wall. The scene that is displayed on one side of the door is both similar and very different from what can be seen on the other side of the door. Metaphor E also depicts the separation between present life as a student at university and the future life as a worker in the city. Metaphor Q shows two pyramids that touch each other but do not intersect. Metaphor A shows the point of change as the participant completes traveling through the tunnel and prepares to dive into the ocean. Graduation is a specific point of completing one task and moving on to the next task. The actual sense of a transition point is reflected in many of the metaphors. Metaphor M displays both separation and continuity. Separation is shown by depicting university and work on separate corners of the page. Continuity is demonstrated by the participant drawing herself as developing through several different stages.

Continuity

Continuity is demonstrated through all of the metaphors that depict the idea of being on a journey. These include metaphors A through I. In some of these metaphors, there is also a sense of a drastic shift in the journey such as metaphor E with the participant leaving one type of environment to go to a different environment.

<u>Growth and Connection</u>

Two of the metaphors were similar in their reflection of growth through the drawing of a cactus for metaphor R and a tree for metaphor T. In metaphor R, the participant drew three small cacti at the top of the page and stated that these are "other women to connect with in the future". Similarly, in metaphor T, the participant stated that "its time to connect with other trees". It is important to note that these participants were in different focus groups so that the similarity is not due to the social influence of hearing another participants' metaphor that resonates with one's own experience.

Considering the idea of connection with others, metaphor O shows the participant with her partner. Metaphor C depicts a crowd of people around the participant. Metaphor E shows the participant with two other people in her university scene and no others are included in the city scene.

<u>Pre-group questionnaire</u>

Participants were given a pre-group questionnaire and asked to respond to questions individually before the start of the focus group. Some of the questions were identical to those asked in the focus group. Other questions differed and these have been included in the analysis.

Aside from collecting demographic information, the pre-group questionnaire contributed in other ways. Firstly, it assisted participants to focus on the topic and provided a chance for them to collect their thoughts about their personal positions before being asked to respond in the group format. Secondly, it provided a means for collecting additional information that could not be collected in the group format due to time constraints.

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

Definitions of Career Success

In response to the question, What is your definition of career success for yourself?, participants reported a wide range of descriptors regarding their perceptions. Much of the vocabulary used was affective and included references to values, personal fulfillment, and professional goals. Participants had written the answers to this question on the pre-group questionnaire independently and before groups began. However, when participants were given the opportunity to add or delete information on the pre-group questionnaire at the close of the focus group, four participants added values to their definitions of career success. Table 12 provides participants' descriptors of career success.

Table 12

Descriptors of Career Success

Category	Participants' statements	n
Values	Monetary compensation	8
	Making a contribution	4
	Challenging	3
	Recognition	2
	Continue learning	2
	Stability	1
	Comfortable Lifestyle	1
	Independence	1
	Harmony with colleagues	1
	Achieving excellence	1
	Working with people	1
	Competence	1
	Confidence	1
	Balanced lifestyle	1
	Skill development	1
Striving for personal fulfillment through work	Fulfillment	2
	Interest	2
	Motivation	2
	Happiness	2
	A job I love	2
	Personal satisfaction	1
	Job satisfaction	1
	Enjoyment	1
	Fulfilling my being, Completing myself.	1
	Feeling that my work life is an integral part of me, one I enjoy and that I feel competent in.	1
	To really have a passion for it.	1
	A meaningful, rewarding position that genuinely affects the lives of others.	1
	I must feel enthusiastic about what I do.	1
Professional goals	Progressing to senior positions	2
	Accomplishing professional goals	1
	To become the best I can at what I do	1
	Utilizing my skills	1

Excluded Occupational Options:

Participants were asked about occupational possibilities that they had considered

in the past and had decided not to pursue as well as the reasons that these occupations had

been excluded. A variety of occupations were noted as past considerations. The reasons

for excluding these options included, 1. Realizing that a specific occupation does not fit

with personal values or personality style (11statements), 2. A decrease in interest or

finding other, more interesting options (7 statements), and 3. Lacking specific skills

required for a particular field (5 statements). The excluded occupational possibilities and

the reasons provided for their exclusion are listed in Table 13.

Table 13
Excluded occupational options

Occupational Options	Reasons for exclusion
Doctor	Good money and prestige but not what I really want
Business (specifically finance), law, school teaching	Educational prerequisites (ie: calculus), talked to people in the field, realized that some fields only look good, experience as volunteer was not indicative of a good "fit"
Teacher, computer programmer, sales, accounting, human resources, marketing, business	Various reasons but mainly that these options did not suit my personality or value base.
Journalism, psychology, counselling psychology, psychiatry, family sciences, architecture, computer programming,	Lost interest, discovered it doesn't "suit" my needs (happiness, capabilities, enjoyment), decreasing possibility of jobs/positions offered (competition).
Masters in journalism, journalism (print) as a career, Fine arts-animation school, commercial art.	I decided I'm not inspired to do that type of writing. Wanted something more stable to fall back on.
Speech therapist, teacher	Too much bureaucracy, too many other people to answer to, not enough freedom, too many others depending on me, I'd play a role in others lives I'm not comfortable with.
Social work	Money, time, area of study
Women's shelter worker	Decided work was too stressful, not fulfilling.
I'm less and less considering law. Considered philosophy grad school and rejected it. Business/commerce	I have a better idea of what these jobs actually are and who I am.
Teacher	At the time, the amount of study and education…ironic now, isn't it.

Occupational Options (continued)	Reasons for exclusion
Japanese rep in UN, teaching, airlines, translator	Lack experience and required skills and connections (social network), too competitive, because I don't want to conform to the traditional "pink collar", "female" jobs, not confident enough, too stressful.
Marketing, advertising, counselling	I didn't like the course structure, I don't see myself in the business sphere, lack of information.
Humanitarian work, tourism	No money, all good paying jobs in Ottawa (not wanting to live there), ethical dilemma with tourism…(*written at the end of group*…will probably enter humanitarian work once I can demand a decent wage.)
Actress, teacher, lawyer	Grew up and decided that my heart wasn't in it, didn't enjoy teaching as much as writing, didn't get a high enough score on LSAT
Early childhood education	My patience became smaller and smaller, low pay might have also contributed to my decision.
Medical doctor, ESL Teacher	I didn't enjoy science courses, I'm afraid that my accent could be a problem.
Teaching elementary or high school	The thought of teaching at those levels leaves me depressed.
Working for the foreign services	Seemed like glorified clerical worker.
3D animator	I'm not a confident person and I'm afraid that I don't have the potential to be an animator.
Physiotherapy	My inability to be a good science student
Working for a private company in their international relations department, working for the government in foreign affairs or Canadian International Development Agency, lawyer	I think I have decided not to pursue these options right now because they are very hard areas to enter in, i.e., lots of competition, as well, the starting positions are not necessarily what I am interested in, decided against lawyer because found something else (politics, int'l relations) that interested me more.

Concerning the third category, Lacking specific skills required for a particular field, it would appear that low self-efficacy is a contributing factor to excluding occupational possibilities. This finding is consistent with Betz and Hackett (1986, 1987). For example, two participants stated that they chose the arts over sciences due to a lack of ability in sciences. Another participant expressed interest in becoming a 3D Animator,

yet added, "I'm not a confident person and I'm afraid that I don't have the potential to be an animator." However, it is difficult to parcel out the difference between exclusion due to low self-efficacy, which is the perception of ability, and actual ability. For example, one participant excluded law due to her low scores on the LSAT. Perhaps she doesn't display the skills necessary to enter the field of law. However, high self-efficacy paired with a strong desire to pursue law would likely lead her to attempt the LSAT again. Although it is difficult to determine with certainty due to the absence of further motivational information regarding her decision, low self-efficacy may be a possible contributing factor in this example.

In addition to the three main categories, there were various other reasons given to exclude occupations such as assessing high levels of competition in the field (2 statements), attaining work experience in the field (2 statements), decreasing job outlook (1 statement), the educational commitment required (1 statement), not wanting to conform to a "pink collar" work role (1 statement), and not wanting to re-locate (1 statement).

Graduation Concerns

Participants were asked, "Do you have any concerns regarding graduation? If yes, what are they?" Of the 21 students, four stated that they had no concerns, one stated "yes and no", and the remaining 16 listed various concerns such as financial independence and paying student loans (7 statements), questioning the value of a B.A. degree (4 statements), concern about grades (3 statements), uncertainty regarding career direction (2 statements), employment (2 statements), ageism and sexism (2 statements), underemployment (1 statement), finding interesting work (1 statement), meeting the

expectations of family members (1 statement), questioning skills (1 statement), wondering if learning will end (1 statement), assignments (1 statement), and personal health (1 statement).

<u>Reflection Questions</u>

At the close of the focus group, participants were asked to respond individually, and in writing, to the following questions. The two reflection questions were used to capture information relating to the dynamic nature of focus group research due to the influence of other group members. Kreuger highlights the uniqueness of focus group research compared to the use of individual interviews and encourages researchers to use many qualitative analysis strategies and approaches (Kreuger, 1998c, p. 20).

<u>Learning about self or group members</u>

At the close of the focus group, participants were invited to respond individually, and in writing to the question, What have you learned about yourself or others?

The students reported that the group provided an opportunity to compare and contrast their personal concerns and experiences with those of others. The majority of statements focused on a comparison of experiences, including observing both similarities and differences. Students also noted that they had been able to clarify their goals and concerns. Many comments were related to gaining greater self-awareness.

The most common type of statement referred to the normalizing effect of the group. For example, "I've realized it's normal for me to feel apprehension as well as excitement towards graduating.", "I feel better knowing that there are other female arts students with my concerns." and, "I learned that my concerns/ fears/ motivations are not unique or isolating."

Group members also noted the differences between themselves and the others such as, "Others had WAY more confidence. They seem so positive that sometimes it makes me reflect on the different ways I sell myself short. Wow...confidence of 10...I wish I had that!" Another example includes, "I learned that being a woman does make a difference in terms of choosing a career (biological influence) for me, but not the other group members so I started questioning myself whether I should try to attain a desired career no matter what obstacles are out there." These statements of difference also allude to the idea of considering viable alternative options that are demonstrated by other group members.

Participants stated that they had clarified some thoughts in the process of the focus group. For example, "I've clarified the conflict between doing what I want and making a living." and, "I'm realizing a little better what success means to me."

For some members, greater self-awareness had been achieved through participation in the group. Participants commented on various areas of awareness. For example, "I learned that I was/ am pretty confident about my future. I might not know what it will be, but I think I will end up where I want to be." A second participant stated, "I learned that I was a lot more focused than I had originally thought." A third example of gaining awareness included, "I've learned that motivation is what moves me forward."

Experience of the group

Participants were also asked to individually write about their experiences of participating in the focus group. Group members commented that participating in the focus group had been a positive experience for them. They commented on their enjoyment of both listening to stories of others and sharing their own thoughts. Similar to

responses related to the first reflection question, many participants again expressed a sense of relief in knowing that others share their concerns. The participants also expressed appreciation of having the chance to consider the questions and clarify their own positions.

The students reported that they enjoyed being able to articulate their thoughts as well as having the chance to hear the stories of other women in the group. An interesting finding of the research is that even in the groups where there were only two participants present, the normalizing effect of hearing similar experiences from another person was highlighted in the reflection questions. For example, in one group of two participants, it was apparent that there was a mutual appreciation of each others' story and journey. The first student responded to the question of her experience as follows, "It was helpful to talk about how I got here and where I'm going. It was also good to see another person's journey to contrast to my own." The second participant commented, "The experience was comfortable and open, I really enjoyed listening to others' experiences, goals, and drives." Similar comments were provided across groups and each participant responded autonomously to the reflection questions in written form without any influence of group discussion before or during this exercise. Other examples of the normalizing effect include, "It is a welcome relief to hear other women resonate my confusion with the future" and, "I am glad other people are thinking about the same issues that I am, I'm not the only confident over-achiever in the world. I realize I'm not so bad off in terms of career goals as I thought."

Participants also commented on the usefulness of considering the questions posed in the group in attaining greater clarity. For example, one of the students commented,

"This group helped me to make a list of issues I will be faced with upon graduation. I gained confidence just talking about graduating and work." A second student reported, "It gave me a chance to think about all these questions and consider them, which I would not have done on my own." A third student stated, "My experience in participating with the group allowed me to clarify my goals and feelings, just by speaking them aloud."

<u>Summary of themes across focus group questions</u>

After the analysis of themes according to individual questions, the themes were further analyzed according to the four questions guiding this research.

1. What is the process by which women graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree make choices regarding their career paths?

       i.)   The process is developmental and it shifts and changes across time.

- Earlier influences included primarily 1. Values, and 2. Family. Additional influences included; interests, impressions/ assumptions/ idealism, ability, past experiences, encouragement of others, and attention to labour market demands.

- Present influences included primarily values such as; financial security, personal satisfaction, social interaction, making a contribution, intellectual challenge, independence, creativity, and taking risks. In addition to values, other present influences included the desire to incorporate interests as well as current or future skills and abilities. Participants also commented on the process of career decision-making such as having the freedom to explore possibilities.

- Future influences included primarily values, such as: personal satisfaction, financial security, making a contribution, intellectual challenge/growth, social interaction, autonomy, status, stability, and time off. Additional influences included the desire to incorporate interests and utilize present or future skills and abilities. Career decision-making considerations, such as the freedom to explore, were also included. An area that emerged as unique to future influences was the desire to balance the interests of present or future partners and/ or future children, consideration of geography/location, and opportunity for travel.

ii.) Developmental concerns included the influences of significant others.

- Earlier developmental influences included family members.

- Later developmental influences included considerations of present or future partners and/ or children.

iii.) Personal values were a strong, guiding force. They changed somewhat according to developmental considerations but were generally consistent across time.

iii.) The choice of pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree included the consideration of 1. Interests, 2. Ability, and 3. Attaining occupational goals.

iv.) In approaching the developmental point of graduation, a variety of occupational choices were considered as possibilities.

v.) The developmental point of university graduation was met with many different emotions such as excitement, fear, concern, freedom, hope, and happiness.

vi.) The three common themes relating to the developmental point of graduation transition included the idea of being in transit on a journey, experiencing a sense of freedom, and an awareness of future choices and options.

vii.) Career success was defined through a combination of 1.Values, 2. Professional goals, and 3. Striving for personal fulfillment through work.

viii.) Reasons for excluding occupational options included, 1. Realizing that a specific occupation does not fit with personal values or personality style, 2. A decrease in interest or finding other, more interesting options, and 3. Lacking specific skills required for a particular field.

ix.) The mutual sharing of career goals and plans with others who are undergoing similar transitions was normalizing and validating.

2. What compromises are made?

i.) The idea of compromise was met with unfamiliarity and uncertainty.

- Few areas of past compromise were articulated.

- Some participants appeared to have difficulty articulating future areas of compromise and stated potential areas of future compromise tentatively.

ii.) There were two primary areas of compromise reported.

    1. Relationships vs. Occupational goals

    2. Money vs. Job satisfaction

- In addition to these two categories of compromise, some participants also commented on their desire to accumulate experience and having to sacrifice job satisfaction temporarily, and sacrificing location for either money, relationships, or job satisfaction.

3. What is their perception of the effect of gender on these choices?

    i.) Perceptions of gender influences were mixed.

- 57% of the participants stated that gender doesn't have any influence on career direction.

- Some participants stated that gender has a very strong influence on career direction.

- Some participants expressed uncertainty about whether or not gender has an effect and to what extent gender is an influence.

- For those who felt that gender was or might be an influence, the reasons they stated included: a sense of being undervalued as compared with men/noting gender differences in wages, interests or occupations; balancing work and family/choosing family friendly options; and an interest in creating change regarding women's issues.

ii.) Participants perceived that their own career development process differs from their mothers' experiences, primarily in two areas: 1. More opportunities and choices in comparison with mother; both in education and occupations and 2. Changes in societies' values and gender expectations in comparison with mother's experience.

4. What is their level of confidence regarding the ability to achieve career goals?

    i.) High. On a scale of 1 to 10, the level of confidence ranged from 5 to 10 with a mean of 7.6 and standard deviation of 1.5.

    ii.) The three main areas that caused an increase in confidence levels were:

        1. Work experience/ Life experience.

        2. Positive feedback/ Encouragement from others.

        3. Clear direction/ Focused goals.

    iii.) The causes of decreasing confidence were more varied and included a diversity of responses referring to concerns about competition with others in the work force, concerns about the value of an arts degree, discouragement due to the job search process, low motivation, unclear career goals, and concerns about grades or achievements.

    iv.) Confidence level was generally perceived to be directly related to career goals.

    v.) A general sense of optimism was noted through frequent use of the words "choice" and "opportunities" as participants referred to their own career paths in comparing to the career paths of their mothers.

<u>Overall Themes of the Research</u>

The third phase of analysis included summarizing the themes across questions and "boiling down" the data into overall themes. This process was optional according to Kreuger (1998c) who states that researchers can choose to analyze the data according to individual questions or across questions. The analysis according to individual questions is sufficient according to Kreuger. In the present study, the analysis process of focusing on data according to individual focus group questions provided detailed information based to a large extent on the number of times that certain ideas were presented by participants. In the present study, a second and third stage of analysis were also conducted and these provided alternate lenses to view the data. The second stage considered the findings according to the research questions guiding the inquiry. The third and last stage was a natural process of reflecting on the primary, underlying themes emerging through the continual interaction with the data. This was accomplished through the reflexive process of qualitative inquiry. The four themes which emerged across focus group questions reflected the decision-making process of graduating female arts students in ways that were qualitatively different from the analysis according to individual focus group questions. These four themes are meant to be an alternate reflection of the data rather than a replacement for the preceding themes according to individual focus group questions. The themes that describe the participants' process of career decision-making include: 1. A developmental process, 2. Optimism, 3. Present-day versus historical influence of gender, and 4. The importance of values.

A Developmental Process

The participants demonstrated a developmental process in terms of the stated influences upon their past, present and future career goals. In considering past factors that have affected career decision-making, immediate family and extended family members were mentioned as important influences. They were not mentioned as influences for present and future factors. In considering future factors, the desire to balance the interests of present or future partners and/ or future children was mentioned. Also, values were mentioned more often for present and future influences than for past influences. Not only were they mentioned more often, but there was more detail provided regarding the range of values. This may demonstrate a crystallizing of values that takes place over time.

There were various stages explored in the participants' process of career decision-making including focusing on past, present, and future influences; considering reasons why they decided to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree; considering their past occupational options and why these were discarded; considering current career possibilities; and considering compromise. It appears that there are differences in how decisions are made regarding the various choices that reflects a developmental process. For example, concerning the decision to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree, participants stated that they made this choice based on a.) Interests, b.) Ability, and c.) Attaining occupational goals. In contrast, there were similarities but also differences noted in how participants decided to discard occupational options that they had considered in the past. As various occupations were considered, those that became excluded from the pool of potential possibilities were excluded due to a.) Realizing that a specific occupation does not fit

with personal values or personality style, b.) A decrease in interest or finding other, more interesting options, and c.) Lacking specific skills required for a particular field. The reasons given for abandoning past options appear to require a higher level of reasoning and self-awareness. There is an underlying sense of assessing the degree of fit between the person and the occupation that is not present to the same degree in the choice about pursuing an arts degree.

Another reflection of the developmental process included the reasons provided for the increases in confidence levels. Participants stated that over time, their confidence levels had increased and that this was attributed to a.) Work experience/ Life experience, b.) Positive feedback/ Encouragement from others, and c.) Clear direction/ Focused goals.

<u>Optimism</u>

The participants demonstrated a sense of optimism in their career choice process through various means; a.) The perception of high self-confidence relating to their ability to attain career success, b.) A sense of greatly improved career choices and options compared with their mothers' options, c.) The number and breadth of career possibilities that were named across participants, d.) Using metaphors that demonstrate ideas such as freedom, optimism, opportunities, and a focus on the future, and e.) The perception that few compromises had been made in the past.

<u>Present-day Versus Historical Influence of Gender</u>

Participants noted that in comparing themselves with their mothers, they benefited through, a.) More opportunities and choices in comparison with mother; both in education and occupations, and b.) Changes in society's values and gender expectations

in comparison with mother's experience. The participants showed a high degree of enthusiasm concerning this issue. They had many stories and examples relating to how their experiences were different from that of their mothers as well as how some of their mothers had changed over time and were now pursuing their own occupational goals.

Participants were divided concerning their perceptions of the influence of gender upon their own career development. 57% of the students thought that being a woman does not influence their career direction. The remainder of the participants thought that gender makes a difference in some ways such as; a sense of being undervalued as compared with men/noting gender differences in wages, interests, or occupations; balancing work and family/choosing family friendly options; and interest in creating change regarding women's issues. Most of the participants expressed a sense of ambivalence about the extent of the gender effect on their career development. This perspective was in sharp contrast to their perceptions of gender expectations on their mothers' career development.

The Importance of Values

Values were noted to be a strong guiding force in the career decision-making process relating to past, present, and future factors. Of all the influences mentioned, values represented 37% of past factors, 57% of present factors, and 60% of future factors. In addition, participants' definitions of career success included a focus on values such as monetary compensation, making a contribution, challenge, recognition and the desire to continue learning among many others. It would appear that values are much more potent to the intuitive process of career decision-making, including personal definitions of career

success, than other influences that are often considered foundational to career counselling such as interests and skills.

Reliability of the Categories

After the data were analyzed according to individual focus group questions, subsamples of items were provided to an independent rater to assess reliability of the categories. The independent rater was a female graduate student pursuing a doctoral degree in the field of counseling psychology. She was provided with 129 separate statements taken from the responses to focus group questions.

Not all of the primary questions or secondary questions were provided due to various factors. For example, some of the questions were "yes and no" questions such as in Question # 1b. where participants were asked whether they had decided to pursue an arts degree previous to starting post-secondary education. It was not necessary for an independent rater to sort yes and no answers. Another example is Question # 2 which asks about occupational possibilities. The categories provided which encompass the range of participants' options contain most of the occupational options listed. It did not seem useful to have the independent rater place them into categories. Another example of questions that were not provided included those that had a diversity of responses that did not fit into overall categories. For example, Question # 5c. where participants were asked about the causes of decreasing confidence. The statements provided resulted in various ideas that could not be categorized into specific themes.

The independent rater was provided with the statements, themes, and corresponding questions. She was asked to sort the statements into the various categories provided. The items were sorted according to the individual focus group questions and

the categories provided for each question ranged from two to six. The agreement between the independent rater and the researcher ranged from 84% to 100%. See Table 14 for the results according to individual focus group questions.

The researcher further considered the individual items that were not in agreement. Most of these items could have been placed into either one of two categories. For example, the independent rater stated that she experienced some difficulty categorizing the statements relating to questions 3a. "What past factors or influences are involved in your decision?" Specifically, she was unsure about whether some items fit into the category of Values or the category of Impressions/Assumptions/Idealism. She placed three items into the latter category including "excitement", "glamour", and "save the world". These items showed disagreement because the researcher had originally sorted them into the Values category. These particular items could potentially fit into either of the two categories. Excitement, glamour, and saving the world may reflect the youthful idealism that Harmon (1989) speaks of. Alternatively, these may also reflect students' values.

Table 14

Rater Agreement

Categories	Items	Agreement
1a. Interests 1a. Ability 1a. Attaining Occupational Goals	11	100%
3a. Family 3a. Values 3a. Impressions/Assumptions/Idealism	19	84%
3b. Values: Financial Security 3b. Values: Contribution 3b. Values: Social Interaction 3b. Values: Personal Satisfaction 3b. Interests 3b. Utilizing Skills and Abilities	15	87%
3c. Values: Financial Security 3c. Values: Contribution 3c. Values: Personal Satisfaction 3c. Values: Intellectual Challenge and Growth 3c. Balancing Work and Family 3c. Incorporating Interests and/or Abilities	13	100%
4. Relationships (Including current or future partners and/or children) versus Occupational Goals 4. Money versus Job Satisfaction and/or Quality of Life 4. Geographical Location	17	94%
5b. Positive Feedback/Encouragement from Others 5b. Work Experience/Life Experience 5b. Clear Direction/Focused Goals	15	93%
6. More Opportunities and Choices in Comparison with Mother (in education and/or occupations) 6. Changes in Societies' Values and Gender Expectations in Comparison with Mothers' Experience	21	90%
7. Being a Women Doesn't Influence Career Decisions 7. Balancing Work and Family/ Choosing "Family Friendly" Career Options 7. Sense of Being Undervalued as Compared with Men; Relating to Gender Differences in Wages, Interests, and Occupational Hierarchy 7. Interest in Creating Change Regarding Women's Issues	18	94%

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This focus group study investigated the career decision-making process of 21 female arts students that were within two years of completing an arts degree. Four questions guided the course of the research. These included:

1. What is the process by which women graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree make choices regarding their career paths?

2. What compromises are made?

3. What is their perception of the effect of gender on these choices?

4. What is their level of confidence regarding the ability to achieve career goals?

The present study was exploratory and its' goal was to launch an inquiry with the four questions serving as a guide. The goal of the study was not to either confirm or disconfirm previous theories of women's career development. However, it is beneficial to consider the findings of the present study in tandem with current theories of women's career development.

Circumscription and Compromise

Gottfredson (1981) spoke about the process of circumscription and compromise that is established early in life and limits the occupational possibilities of women. She posits that women will always sacrifice interest first, prestige second, and sex-type last. Other researchers have found that sex type is consistently compromised over prestige (Leung, 1993; Leung & Plake, 1990; Hesketh, Durant, & Pryor, 1990; Hesketh, Elmslie, & Kaldor, 1990).

In the present study, values were articulated as the primary guiding factors in the career decision-making process in the past, present, and future. Although the concept of prestige in Gottfredson's theory is a value, it was not specifically articulated by any of the participants. However, prestige may be confounded in some cases with the idea of high earnings. Many of the participants stressed the importance of a job that pays well. Although interests were also included as considerations, values appeared to be much more salient in the selection of occupations. The gender-fit of a particular occupation was not articulated as a factor with the exception of one participant who stated, "Teaching is a good career for a woman." However, in consideration of her larger context, this participant expressed her goal of having children and placing "family first". There were several others who also spoke about balancing the desire to have a family with occupational goals. This idea of balancing family and occupational goals may have more relevance to ideas of compromise than considering the selection of occupations based purely on gender.

Davey and Stoppard (1993) have critiqued the idea of homogeneity across women in Gottfredson's theory. They studied the occupational expectations of female adolescents and summarized that Gottfredson's theory could only be partially supported by their findings. The group of women who participated in the study ranged in age from 20 to 42 with a mean of 25.4. When they were asked about the differences between their own career decision-making processes with that of their mothers, strong themes emerged. These related to their perception of the positive changes in society's expectations and the enhanced opportunities and choices available for them. Moen et al. (1997) highlight the dramatic changes, which have been documented in the gender role ideology and work

role identity of women over a thirty-year period. It is possible that in the two decades since Gottfredson first published her theory, societal changes have altered the process of career development of women so dramatically that past theories which at one time were relevant, are no longer viable, or only partially valid.

However, this may be an overly optimistic view. An alternate possibility for the differences between Gottfredson's model and the findings of the present study is that some career decision-making influences operate outside of an individual's awareness. Valian (1999) discusses the gender schemas that both men and women use which operate according to specific expectations of gender appropriateness and are often outside of an individual's conscious awareness. These gender schemas can serve to undermine the best of intentions for gender equality. According to this idea, participants may not have articulated the importance of gender-fit in the selection of occupations because they are not consciously aware of this selection criterion.

Self-efficacy

Hackett and Betz (1981) utilized Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) to describe women's career development. They postulated that women's low self-efficacy expectations were related to the underrepresentation of women in traditionally male dominated careers. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perceptions or beliefs that he or she will be able to successfully perform a given behaviour. Hackett and Betz (1997) highlight the importance of self-efficacy beliefs as potential facilitators or barriers to women's career choices. Betz (1994) describes career self-efficacy, "career self-efficacy theory is based on subjective perceptions of, rather than objectively measured, characteristics- the important variable influencing individuals perceived range of career

options is not their measured abilities, but their beliefs concerning their competence in various behavioral domains." (p. 36).

Bandura (1997) describes the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: 1. Enactive mastery experiences that indicate capability; 2. Vicarious experiences (observing role models); 3. Verbal persuasion (encouragement from others); and 4. Physiological and affective states (levels of anxiety in pursuing specific tasks) (p. 79). These sources of self-efficacy contribute to an individual's overall self-assessment of confidence in pursuing specific activities.

Participants in this study were asked about their levels of confidence in the ability to achieve career success. Overall, the students' perceptions of confidence ranged from 5 to 10 with a mean of 7.6. The concept of self-efficacy includes the idea of perceived confidence in one's ability. Therefore, it could be stated that the participants in this study have high self-efficacy in the goal of attaining career success.

The students were also asked about increases in their confidence levels. The themes that arose in response to this question are directly relevant to two sources of self-efficacy beliefs: 1. Enactive mastery experiences that indicate capability and 2. Verbal persuasion (encouragement from others) (Bandura, 1997). In the present study, these related to the themes; 1. Work experience/ life experience, and 2. Positive feedback/ encouragement from others. The participants commented on the value of work experience, life experience, and encouragement as being directly related to increases in their confidence levels. This supports Bandura's ideas regarding self-efficacy beliefs.

In considering the contribution of self-efficacy to career counselling, Betz (1994) reminds researchers, "because it is embedded in a learning theory of its origins that is

directly applicable to counseling interventions, self-efficacy theory has applied as well as theoretical utility." (p. 36). Students may benefit from learning about the sources of self-efficacy beliefs in order to increase their own self-efficacy through practical means such as pursuing opportunities to build experiences in specific areas.

Astin's Sociological Model of Career Choice and Behaviour

Astin (1984) proposed that work behaviour is intended to satisfy the needs of survival, pleasure, and contribution. She spoke about survival as primarily physiological survival. In this study, students often commented on the importance of earnings and expressed concern about financial independence consequent to graduation. Pleasure is defined as "the intrinsic pleasure of the work activities themselves" (p. 120). The participants highlighted the importance of job satisfaction. Their definitions of career success included the sense of striving for personal fulfillment through work tasks. Astin's third need of contribution is also reflected in the present study, although not to the extent of the former two work needs. Several participants commented on the desire to make a contribution or to help others.

Astin (1984) also highlighted the influence of the perceived structure of opportunity and the possible changes that can be made, "Expectations developed through socialization and through early perceptions of the structure of opportunity can be modified by changes in the structure of opportunity, and this modification in expectations can lead to changes in career choice and in work behaviour." (p. 119). The participants in this study commented on the changes in the structure of opportunity for themselves as compared with their mothers' experiences. They spoke about the perception that society had changed in expectations for women with the result of increased career options and

choices for themselves. The students spoke about their mothers' limited choices and interestingly, that several mothers were currently following the lead of the student and exploring new career possibilities that they had not had opportunity to explore in the past. Astin's model regarding the possibility of changes in the structure of opportunity and the resulting changes in career choices contains an optimistic tone and is certainly demonstrated across participants in this study.

<u>Valian's Theory of Why Women's Advancement is Slow Compared to Men</u>

Valian (1999) proposed that the reasons why women advance more slowly than men in professional fields are due to the gender schemas that both men and women hold as well as the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage. In the present study, it is difficult to assess whether Valian's ideas apply to the participants. Since most of them are at the beginnings of their career paths, the accumulation of advantages and disadvantages have not yet accrued into a measurable form. However, there are a few hints of potential future advantages and disadvantages through some comments made by participants. For example, when the students were asked about the influence of gender on their career paths, one participant expressed uncertainty. She mentioned that she knows a male colleague who is earning a large sum of money and added that she can't imagine herself earning the same amount. Valian discusses various gender differences including the earlier training of boys in negotiating their labour for money as compared to girls. Along with the earlier development of negotiating fees, men also expect greater remuneration for their time as compared to women. Hughes and Lowe (1993) studied Canadian graduates' earnings during the first 12 months after graduation and found that men had net earnings 17 percent greater than women and they also demonstrated better

self-assessed prospects for promotion. In light of the research on gender difference and wages, the participant may indeed find herself at an earnings disadvantage as compared to her male colleague. She may not be concerned because she has already voiced that she cannot imagine herself earning the same amount. Valian speaks to the small differences of this sort that accumulate over time to become "mountains" (p. 5).

Considering gender schemas, the participants were asked about the influence of gender on their career paths. The reactions were mixed with over half of the students stating that gender did not influence career direction. However, Valian (1999) explains that gender schemas are " a set of implicit, or nonconscious, hypotheses about sex differences" (p.2). Therefore, even when the individual does not perceive gender bias in their own or others' reactions and behaviours, gender schemas operate outside of direct awareness. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider participants' gender schemas but it is somewhat disconcerting that female students believe that gender is no longer relevant to their own career paths when it is quietly shaping and influencing choices and opportunities outside of awareness.

A Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

Patton and McMahon (1999) review a systems theory framework for both women and men. They consider the individual within the context of a larger system, and this system is composed of two subsystems; "the social contextual system (the other people systems with which the individual interacts) and the environmental/societal contextual system (the environment and society)." (p. 158). The many influences include individual differences such as gender, values, sexual orientation, ability, disability, interests, skills, age, world-of-work knowledge, physical attributes, aptitudes, ethnicity, self-concept,

personality, beliefs, and health (p. 157). In addition to these, the social system includes educational institutions, peers, family, media, community groups, and the workplace (p. 159). Finally, the environmental-societal system adds the influences of geographical location, political decisions, historical trends, globalization, socioeconomic status, and the employment market (p. 160). The authors also consider the recursive nature of all the influences, the changes that take place over time, and the impact of chance circumstances that are unplanned.

The women in this study commented on the impact of many of these influences. A strength of the systems model is that it allows for recursiveness and flexibility as compared to more traditional linear career theories. Most of the participants in this study were embarking on their career paths while a few of the women had pursued one occupational option and returned to higher education to consider alternate possibilities. For these women, the recursive nature of the systems model appeared to reflect their process. For example, one of the participants stated that she had chosen her first occupation partially based on her plan to have children. Subsequently, her plan to have children changed, she learned that her chosen occupation did not fit well with her personality and interests, and she returned to university to pursue a different field. In this case, there was change over time relating to family plans, world-of-work knowledge, and several other influences. The recursive nature of the model allows for changes in each of the influences, and these, in turn, create changes in the entire system. Astin's (1984) ideas regarding the structure of opportunity may be explained by a systems model where the perception of opportunities changes, and therefore, this creates changes in the entire system. The systems model offers an explanation for the changes in participants'

perceptions of increased career choices compared with their mothers. For example, influences in the environmental-societal system such as political decisions, employment market, globalization, and historical trends may have in turn, influenced parts of the social system such as community groups, the media, and educational institutions, which in turn may have influenced parts of the individual. The change can start in any part of the system to influence the entire system. Therefore, the series of continuous changes affected women's careers a generation ago very differently than the current generation of university graduates.

<u>Limitations</u>

This study, being qualitative in nature, is limited in terms of generalizability. Statistical analyses are typically not appropriate for focus group studies because "the group samples are usually both unrepresentative and dangerously small." (Morgan & Krueger, 1993, p. 14). The study includes a small segment of the population and the findings cannot be generalized to all women. Participants consisted of female arts students who expressed interest in attending a two-session career planning group which was designed as a research project. Readers are encouraged to review the demographic information to assess applicability to other populations. For example, the participants in this study are homogenous according to specific aspects, such as belonging to the group of female arts students. Their ages are also generally within a narrow range. However, this group of 21 women represents a variety of fields in the Faculty of Arts and a diversity of cultural backgrounds. This is a strength of the study. This cultural diversity is also characteristic of the university that they attend. The findings cannot be generalized to all women identified with the various cultural backgrounds represented. However, the

findings include the diversity of cultural viewpoints represented by the group and therefore, have greater utility for applicability to women from various cultural backgrounds.

A second limitation also relates to the selection of participants for the study. All of the participants were volunteers who responded to an advertisement posted at various locations at the university. They volunteered to take part in a two-session career planning group with a focus group design for the first session. In the telephone screening process, several of the participants commented that they were pleased to be a part of research on women's career development and others expressed that they were in need of career planning and direction. The process of self-selection for the groups may include personal incentives to participate in the study that place limits on the inclusion of the broad category of female arts students. For example, it is possible that students who had already made a clear decision regarding career direction may not have been interested to participate in the study. However, it is also important to note that there were several participants who had decided on a specific occupation and volunteered for the group seeking confirmation regarding their decisions.

A third limitation of the study includes the consideration of focus group design in obtaining data. Due to the group format and time constriction of two hours, it is necessary to limit the number of focus group questions. When participants are responding to questions, it is also important to limit the amount of open discussion that naturally takes place in the group so that there is sufficient time to gather responses to all of the questions. At times, participants raised issues or opinions that would have been beneficial to explore further, within a group discussion, but choosing to encourage the

discussion would have detracted from the quality or quantity of the remaining focus group questions guiding the research. The focus group questions were arranged in way that would elicit the maximum amount of information (Kreuger, 1998a).

<u>Applications of the Study</u>

The findings of the study provide several practical applications that counsellors may incorporate in working with women on issues of career development.

According to this study, developmental differences were noted such as the influences of family members in earlier stages of career development and the consideration of future partners and children in later stages. Some of the findings of the study including the developmental process, optimism, the historical and current influence of gender and the importance of values can be useful for counselors to consider as they are working with women who are making career decisions. Counselors might also find it encouraging to note the general sense of optimism and a broadening of the perceived structure of opportunity for women in this study.

For the purposes of the present research, the focus group session was not designed to serve as a counselling intervention. The second session was provided to assist students with the graduation transition and the data for this research study were taken solely from the first session. However, based on the individual, written feedback from the focus group session, students found that the process of meeting together in the group was beneficial. There were many comments attesting to a sense of relief in knowing that others share similar concerns. The students also made references to gaining greater clarity regarding career direction through engaging in the focus group process. It would appear that adapting a focus group format for the purposes of student growth and

development rather than research would be a useful strategy for counsellors. Focus groups have traditionally been used solely for the purposes of data collection. According to this study, the focus group design was shown to have clinical utility and provided the duel role of both data collection as well as providing participants with the opportunity to consolidate their experiences regarding school-to-work transition. The literature relating to focus groups is very strong pertaining to selection of participants and procedures of conducting groups. The present research was informed by the focus group literature in various ways that also increased the potential for the group format to serve as a counselling intervention.

Suggestions for Further Research

The present research has provided information regarding the career decision-making process of women who are graduating with Bachelor of Arts degrees. The study is exploratory and it enriches the body of literature on women's career development by examining the current decision-making processes taking place as young women decide on their career paths in the year 2000.

Although the participants represented a diversity of cultural backgrounds, a larger sample size of participants would be required to generalize to other populations. Therefore, the study could be replicated with a greater number of participants. Similarly, the students were all pursuing arts degrees and further research could include students from other disciplines.

Many current career development theories no longer apply to either women or men (Crozier, 1999). Therefore, it may be beneficial to replicate the current study

focusing on men and their career decision-making process to examine both similarities and differences across genders.

In this study, the women enjoyed the format of the focus groups because they were able to share their own thoughts with those of other women. It may be beneficial to adapt the group format to an intervention tailored to graduating students in order to assist them in the graduation transition. Several of the participants commented on the usefulness of drawing metaphors in reflection of their graduation transition. Graduating students may benefit from using metaphors to reflect on their transitions as well as in clarifying future goals.

The women were asked to comment on their thoughts about their career options compared to those of their mothers. There was ample discussion and many examples provided relating to this question. Harmon (1989) speaks about the "youthful optimism" that was demonstrated in her longitudinal study (p. 61). Harmon focused on the career aspirations of a group of freshmen women in 1968 and another group in 1983. She adds that there was "youthful optimism about the amount of education and socioeconomic status to be achieved which was tempered by reality in the adult women" (the first group queried again in 1981). It would be useful to conduct a longitudinal study to assess whether this optimism can be attributed to a specific life stage and whether or to what degree the "tempering of reality" affects women in the current historical context.

It would be interesting to invite mothers along with their daughters to discuss changes in career opportunities. Young et. al. (1998) studied the career conversations of adolescents and played back each video-taped conversation immediately after it took place to assess what each adolescent was thinking and feeling as the conversation

progressed. Using this format with daughters and their mothers might be beneficial in assessing whether there are generational differences in gender schemas and perceived career options.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Advertisement for Participant Recruitment

APPENDIX B

Letter of Consent

APPENDIX C

Pre-Group Questionairre

Pre-Group Questionairre

Age:_____

Area of study:_____

Mother's occupation:_____

Father's occupation:_____

How many siblings do you have and where are you in the birth order? Please provide gender and age of your siblings (i.e. brother-28yrs sister-26 yrs me-22yrs).

_____

What are your current career goals or possible options that you are considering?

_____

_____

What are some occupational possibilities that you have considered in the past and have decided not to pursue?

_____

_____

Why did you decide not to pursue these options?

_____

_____

What is your definition of career success for yourself?

_____

_____

What is your confidence level, on a scale of 1 to 10, that you will be able to attain career success? 1= very low confidence and 10= very high confidence _____

Do you have any concerns regarding graduation? (Circle one) yes   no   If yes, what are they? _____

_____

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questions

Questions for Focus Group:

1a. Why did you choose to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree?
 b. Was it planned before you started post-secondary or did you decide during your post-secondary experience?

2. What are your career plans and career possibilities?

3. What factors or influences are involved in your decision?
   a. Past?
   b. Present?
   c. Future?

4. a. Have you made compromises/ do you plan to make compromises in deciding on career direction?
   b. What are these areas of compromise?

5. What is your confidence level in your ability to achieve your career goals?
   a. On a scale of 1 to 10? (1=low, 10=high)
   b. Considering the history of your confidence levels, what have been the causes of increasing confidence?
   c. What have been the causes of decreasing confidence?
   d. What role will your confidence level play in your career goals?

6. How do you think your career opportunities and your career decision-making process compare to your mother's experiences?

7. How do you think being a woman influences and impacts your career direction?

8. How would you describe your experience of the graduation transition?
       -Using a metaphor?