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## Towards a Model of Female Occupational Behavior: A Human Development Approach

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Substantial evidence suggests that women have added the role of worker to their characteristic adult roles of wife and mother. The inclusion of a work cycle in the female life course is a significant alteration of traditional roles, and is likely to have a major impact on both individual lives and the social structure. However, little has been done to incorporate these changes into theoretical perspectives on occupational development. This paper examines the literature on women and work by reviewing, at the societal level, the trends in female labor force activity since 1900 and, at the individual level, theories of the development of occupational behavior. An integration of these two areas is then suggested through an evaluation of their relevance to the human development paradigm.

Over the past quarter century, a dramatic change has occurred in the life course of American women through the addition of a work role to their traditional adult roles of wife and mother (Van Dusen & Sheldon, 1976). Even though this inclusion of a work cycle in the female life

course will have a major impact on both the lives of individual women and on the social structure, only in the last decade has female labor force participation and its consequences attracted the attention of social and behavioral scientists. Existing research remains, however, limited in focus and scope by outdated empirical and theoretical conceptualizations of women and work. As Almquist (1977) notes, "most current research is macrosociological rather than microsociological, based on large-scale, impersonal, aggregated, and static data rather than small-scale, personal, disaggregated, and dynamic findings. From this we get a very firm appraisal of women's overall position in the labor force but we do not know the processes by which they attained it" (pp. 853-854). Consequently, although we do know about changes in female labor force participation over time, we know little about the developmental course of the work cycle in women's lives.

The task of explicating the work cycle of women clearly rests with social scientists of the life course, human developmentalists, whose perspective is uniquely suited to integrating and interpreting such changes in patterns of female labor force participation with changes in the development of the work cycle in women. However, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of life course changes in women's lives, little has been done to explain such changes in developmental terms or incorporate them into theories of the development of occupational behavior. In preparation for such a synthesis, this paper reviews existing literature related to women and work which includes, at the societal level, trends of female labor force activity from 1900 to 1975, and, at the individual level, theories of the development of occupational behavior. An integration of these levels of analysis will be suggested through an evaluation of their relevance to the human development paradigm. Thus, this paper attempts a multiple contribution by laying the groundwork for future studies of adult development to address the work cycle of women as a distinct process and as a component of human development, which should in turn stimulate research into a model of female occupational behavior.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In the literature, the behavior to which we are referring has many names: career development; occupational development; vocational behavior. We use the term "occupational behavior" in order to distinguish between the meanings of occupation and career. The term "career" has developmental implications in that a "career" normally has an orderly sequence of progressively higher-level stages within a small number of specific, elite occupations. Because it is clear that most women have "jobs" rather than "careers", we have chosen to refer to such activity as "occupational behavior" because all women who work exhibit occupational behavior but only a few exhibit career development.

tive that synthesizes the outcome of a macro-level process with individual-level behavior. In the following sections the basis of such a perspective, that of human development, is described, and theories of the development of occupational behavior are discussed and evaluated.

### LIFE-SPAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Human life-span development is a multi-disciplinary science drawn primarily from sociology and psychology whose primary concerns are the identification, description, and explication of ontogenetic (age-related) intraindividual behavioral change from birth to death and with the properties and characteristics of these changes and of the variables governing them (Baltes & Goulet, 1970). Human developmentalists view behavior as a dynamic process and address the complexities of that process through the study of the mechanisms, antecedents, consequences, and transitions that comprise behavioral development. Our use of the terms family cycle and work cycle therefore reflects a developmental orientation toward the study of major life roles. Human developmentalists are not restricted to the observation and specification of phenomena at the individual level of analysis, but are also able to identify and analyze the impact of social structure on the life course of the individual and vice versa. That is, human developmentalists are able to specify determinants of behavior as originating from both current and historical aspects of the social structure and the individual and can take into account the simultaneous effects of social structural and individual level factors.

Central to the human development paradigm is the conceptualization of behavior as the product of "a changing system of antecedent-consequent relationships operating over time" (Baltes, 1973, p. 460). Developmental researchers therefore focus on the analysis of cumulative, multivariate processes defined by time-related interactions between both individual and societal variables. Process is assumed to incorporate related behavioral responses which occur in an orderly sequence and group into phases or stages across the life span. Such stages become increasingly complex over time as more multivariate historical phases are antecedent to concurrent ones. Stages or phases occur continuously where there is little qualitative change and more quantitative change, and discontinuously when the reverse is true. The human development paradigm is, in the very broadest sense, an articulation of the interface of

all aspects of the individual with all relevant aspects of the social structure over time. Because it can account for this interface on both conceptual and empirical levels, the human development perspective is ideally suited for problems such as the specification of a model of vocational behavior.

Adaptation of the human development paradigm to the development of occupational behavior is relatively incomplete. Some vocational theorists (Cooley, 1964; Holland, 1963) have isolated important components of vocational behavior such as personality traits but have failed to conceptualize them as part of a complex process. Others (Lohnes, 1965; Mitchell, Jones, & Krumboltz, Note 1), have specified a process model in vocational development but have not described a comprehensive one. While Lohnes recognized process to be the central issue in occupational behavior, he did not complete the specification of the process by elaborating the presence of stages, the modes or mechanisms for change between stages, or the complexity of the process itself (i.e., possible interactions between historical, concurrent, individual, and social structural factors). Mitchell, Jones, & Krumboltz (Note 1) identify career decisions of individuals both as transition points and as "mechanisms" for change in the development of occupational behavior. However, they do not consider the decisions themselves to be qualitatively different across life or as life-stage markers. Among occupational theorists, examination of occupational behavior as an ontogenetic process over the life course is minimally considered. Finally, nearly all theorists who posit a process of occupational development focus solely on the individual level of analysis and rarely address the historical or social context of the process (Borow, 1964).

At present, research into the adult years among women concentrates on the family life cycle rather than on the work cycle, and no formal theory of the development of female occupational behavior exists. Early attempts to address the work cycle of women have not been successful either in generating research or in stimulating theoretical advances, primarily because of insufficient specification of a model (Psathas, 1968) and questionable assumptions about women and work (Zytowski, 1969). Within the area of vocational psychology, however, there are several formal theories relating to occupational behavior at the individual level which might contribute to an understanding of the work cycle of women. In the next section, such theories will be evaluated for their relevance to women and to the human development paradigm.<sup>4</sup> A

<sup>4</sup>We are indebted in this paper to Samuel Osipow who has written an excellent and comprehensive review of theories of career development (see Samuel Osipow, *Theories of*

To summarize, Roe's theory of vocational choice states that the parenting style mediates the need hierarchy developed by an individual which in turn determines the ultimate vocational choice in the context of genetically determined skills and abilities.

### *Holland*

Holland's (1963) theory of vocational choice is derived from the trait-factor tradition in personality research and represents an important extension of that tradition through its attempt to specify the means by which different personality types translate self-knowledge into vocational choice within a social context. Holland posits that most people organize their beliefs about the world of work through the use of occupational stereotypes whose study can reveal important information about personality dynamics in the same way that projective techniques give insights into unconscious motives. Therefore, the relationship between personality and vocational choice is mediated to a large extent by stereotypic typologies of occupations. In his research, Holland studied several large samples of students participating in the National Merit Scholarship program using a methodology of multiple observations of occupational behavior over specified time spans, some moderate and some long in length, as the empirical basis of his theory.

Holland organizes the critical elements in his theory according to hierarchical structures at both the individual and societal levels of analysis which explain major factors in the vocational choice process. The first is a classification of six major work environments in American society as motoric, intellectual, supportive, conforming, persuasive, or esthetic environments. At the individual level is a classification of six specific personality types corresponding to each occupational environment. In the motoric orientation would be found people who prefer dealing with concrete problems because they, in Holland's view, prefer to "act out" rather than "think through" problems. People in the intellectual orientation, in contrast, work independently with problems of an ambiguous nature. Those in the supportive orientation prefer work reflecting their desire for attention in a structured setting and their ability to solve problems through feelings and interpersonal relations. In the conforming orientation are people comfortable with structured and subordinate roles who achieve their goals by identifying with authority. People of the persuasive orientation, on the other hand, choose loosely-defined work situations where they can exercise verbal skills and acquire power, status, and leadership. Finally, those in the esthetic orien-

tion prefer to deal with objects in the environment rather than people. A concept Holland calls the level hierarchy determines the specific level within an occupation reached by an individual which can be predicted by the following formula: occupational level = intelligence + self-evaluation where self-evaluation is a function of socioeconomic characteristics, level of education, self concept, and drive for achievement. In a final hierarchical scheme, the developmental hierarchy, Holland posits an idiosyncratic ordering of preferences toward the major occupational environments by each individual. In Holland's view, the stability of the vocational choice is a function of such rank orderings of orientations because certain groupings are more suitable for some occupations than others.

There are three stages to the operation of Holland's vocational choice process. In the first, "a person directs himself toward the major occupational class for which his development has impelled him by selecting the occupational class at the head of his particular hierarchy of classes" (Holland, 1966, p. 132). Then, "within a major class of occupations, the person's selection of an occupation is a function of his self-evaluation and his ability (intelligence) to perform successfully in his chosen environment" (p. 133). Finally, both of these stages "are mediated by a series of personal factors, including self-knowledge and evaluation, knowledge of occupation classes . . . the orderliness of the developmental hierarchy; and a series of environmental factors . . . imposed by socioeconomic resources and the physical environment" (p. 133). Successful completion of the process by the individual depends on the soundness of the structure in the developmental hierarchy and the accuracy of the ranking in the level hierarchy.

To summarize, Holland has posited a theory of vocational choice in which an individual's knowledge of self and of the world of work interact to facilitate an occupational choice. Through a complex ranking procedure of many dimensions, the individual undergoes a process by which personality dispositions are fitted to a specific occupational setting within a framework of certain abilities, skills, and socioeconomic factors.

### *Ginzberg*

In the early 1950s, Eli Ginzberg and his colleagues presented a general theory of occupational choice based on the following premise:

Our basic assumption was that an individual reaches his ultimate decision, not at any single moment in time, but through a series of

STAGE Substage	AGE RANGES	GOAL OF STAGE
GROWTH	1-14	growth of self-concept through interaction with family and peers
EXPLORATION:  Tentative Transition Trial (little commitment)	15-22	testing of vocational choices through school, part-time work and play
ESTABLISHMENT:  Trial (commitment) Advancement	23-44	implementation of a career choice and stabilization within an occupation
MAINTENANCE  DECLINE	45-64  65+	continuity of vocational behavior along established lines  preparation for retirement and relinquishment of work role

FIGURE 4. Super's self-concept theory of the development of vocational behavior.

The major propositions of this theory of vocational choice are: First, that people differ in personality, abilities, and interests and are therefore qualified for a variety of occupations, while each occupation requires a certain pattern of personality traits, abilities and interests in its workers. Second, people change with time and experience so that vocational choice and subsequent adjustment to that choice is a continuous process. Finally, the process of vocational development is essentially that of developing and implementing a self concept through a complex, interactional process of genetic aptitudes, physiological make-up, opportunity to play social roles and self-evaluation. That process is charted in the series of vocational stages depicted in Figure 4.<sup>5</sup> Further, self-concept, the personality component of the theory, is a continually evolving construct which becomes increasingly differentiated and complex with maturation. Therefore, over time a vocational self-concept, a sub-system of the general self-concept, emerges. Although Super does not specify its

<sup>5</sup>Super has also developed an elaborate set of vocational tasks which is too lengthy to be included here. The interested reader is directed to Super, Starishevsky, Matlin and Jordaan (1963).

developmental process, the vocational self-concept is presumed to evolve through the mechanisms of identity-testing, identification, and interaction with the environment during the early life stages critical to vocational development.

To summarize, Super has posited a multi-level, multi-stage theory of vocational development. Organized within a system of life-stages, each requiring different vocational behaviors, the theory states that vocational development is a process by which the individual reaches a compromise between abilities and interests and the demands of the environment. Through the development of a vocational self-concept and the mastery of vocational tasks, the individual successfully completes the stages of preference, choice, entry, and adjustment in the occupational world.

#### *Evaluation of Theories*

Both Roe and Holland fail to meet one or more of the human development criteria of process, comprehensiveness and a life course perspective. While Roe identified sources of stages in a process, her static model does not explain how the variables interact after early childhood. Possible dialectical relationships between parent and child or inconsistencies in parenting style are never considered. Nor does Roe ever address the social context in which her model is embedded. While Holland does credit the individual's perception of the social structure with an important role, his theory has a major limitation in his uncritical use of occupational stereotypes as a key theoretical concept. Vetter (1975), among others, has discussed how such stereotypes cause employers to exclude qualified women, and women to exclude themselves, from many occupations. Holland's work is also flawed by his failure to specify a developmental process. The origins of traits important to vocational choice are never identified, and there is no sense of the time in which the fit between individual and occupational hierarchies should occur. Thus, neither Roe nor Holland presents theoretical formulations adequate for a developmental approach to the occupational behavior of women.

Ginzberg and Super do satisfy the stipulated developmental criteria. However, Ginzberg's use of an elite sample of college women, whose work cycles are probably not representative of typical employment patterns, to test his theory raises serious questions about its general validity. Consequently, a realistic specification of the work cycle of women, including the effect of interruptions in work histories or education (Tittle

(specialized training or intensive career-building activity). Because the timing schedules in each of these cycles are set, more or less implicitly, by reference to norms of age-appropriate behavior which are established by the social structure (Neugarten & Danan, 1973) and which differ for men and for women, new theories of the development of occupational behavior of women which can account for the temporal complexities of the female life course must be forthcoming, given the changes in women's life patterns during the course of this century. Thus, the timing of events in the work cycle of women raises new issues in vocational theory. These issues must be examined both within the context of the work cycle itself and in relation to other developmental cycles in the adult life course, if we are to understand how age and sex interact to determine the occupational behavior of women.

In conclusion, the specification of the work cycle of women is a complex task in which the biological, social, historical, and psychological processes simultaneously present in the adult life course must be considered within a context of major changes in the life course patterning of women. The developmental criteria of process, comprehensiveness, and a life course perspective not only suggest directions for theory creation but provide the bases necessary for the specification of a model of female occupational behavior as well. Hence, the human development perspective makes a valuable contribution through its potential for integrating multiple factors into systematic, coherent description and explication of the work cycle of women, which ultimately should result in a model of female occupational behavior.

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