

Older Women's Work and Learning Pathways: Stories of Transition and Adaptability



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Background

- ❖ Women's career paths
- ❖ Ageism and sexism
- ❖ Retention of older workers
- ❖ Policy context [Governments & organisations: up-skilling, re-skilling, re-entry to the labour market]
- ❖ International comparisons

Research Design and Method

Research Design

❖ Qualitative, cross-country case study comparison

Method Procedure

- ❖ Semi-structured interviews of approximately 1 hour duration
- ❖ England – telephone interviews (digital recordings)
- ❖ Australia, South Africa, Italy & Germany – face to face interviews - time and location suitable for participants (recordings)
- ❖ Interviews recorded and transcribed

Method

Areas for Investigation

- ❖ 5 sections
 - ❖ Background Information (age, income, marital status, employment status, highest qualification, dependents)
 - ❖ Present, past and future work and learning experiences
 - ❖ Previous work and learning transitions
 - ❖ Nature of previous work and learning transitions
 - ❖ Learning from previous transitions and moving forward

Method

Data Analysis

- ❖ Based on grounded theory
- ❖ Two stage, nine phase thematic analysis across three initial countries: Australia, England and South Africa
- ❖ Stage 1: Five phases of code category development resulting in 9 master code categories
- ❖ Stage 2: Four phases of subsequent refinement of master codes
- ❖ Stage 3: Application of similar process to coding subsequent countries

Method

Trustworthiness of Findings

- ❖ Credibility - confidence in their 'truth'
- ❖ Transferability - applicability in other contexts
- ❖ Dependability - consistency and replication
- ❖ Confirmability - neutrality (findings shaped by respondents, not researchers)

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

The Participants

Introducing the storytellers

- ❖ Women aged 45 – 65
 - ❖ 45 and over, the benchmark used to describe mature age workers, and an age after which it has become very difficult for people to re-enter the workforce once they have left it
 - ❖ 12 Australian; 12 English; 12 South African; 12 Italian; 12 German
- ❖ Purposive sample

Overall Findings

Master Codes

- ❖ Learning across the lifespan
- ❖ Transitions and responses
- ❖ Intrapersonal Influences
- ❖ Work Influences
- ❖ Financial Influences
- ❖ Social Influences
- ❖ Relocation
- ❖ Advice to Others
- ❖ Future Planning

Overall Findings

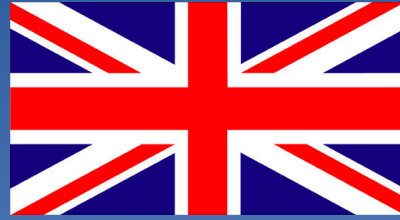
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Overall Findings

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- ❖ Learning across the lifespan
 - ❖ Australian Stories
- ❖ Transitions and responses
 - ❖ German Stories
- ❖ Intrapersonal Influences
 - ❖ Italian Stories
- ❖ Work Influences
 - ❖ English Stories
- ❖ Social Influences
 - ❖ South African Stories



English Stories

Work Influences

*Combating occupational segregation:
The role for careers guidance and counselling*



The Context: English Women

❖ Progress:

In the 35/40 years since equality legislation, there have been many advances in women's position in society:

- More women in work – 70.6% of women compared with 79.2% men (Walby, Armstrong & Humphreys (2008);
- Girls outperform boys at all stages of the National Curriculum (Johnson & Kossykh, 2008)



The Context: English Women

❖ Problems:

- The pay and opportunity gap for women remains:
 - UK statistics show that women's wages are, on average, 20% lower than men's (Johnson & Kossykh, 2008)
- Women are crowded into a narrow range of low paying (PT) occupations:
 - Nearly two-thirds of women are employed in 12 occupational groups, whilst two-thirds of men are employed in 26 occupational groups (Women & Work Commission, 2006)



English Participants

Introducing the storytellers

❖ Aged 45 – 65:

45 - 50 (3); 51 - 55 (5); 56 - 60 (1); 61 – 65 (3)

❖ Marital status:

Married (8); Divorced (3); Widowed (1)

❖ Educational level:

Sub-degree (1); Degree (3); PG Diploma (1); Masters (6); Doctorate (1)

❖ Employment status:

Full time (7); Self-employed (2); Redundant (1); Retired (1); Vocation (1)



English Study Work Influences

- ❖ Prejudice & discrimination becoming increasingly subtle and covert (modern sexism)
- ❖ Sexual discrimination & harassment are 'major stressors' in the lives of working women, alongside home conflicts, child-care responsibilities & workplace politics
- ❖ Many surveys indicate that large numbers of women (& some men) are affected



English Study Work Influences

It was very grim. It was an awful time. And I think...I made myself quite ill over the whole thing.

It was all personal. It was inside me. I felt so wretched about the whole situation and it just seemed so, dare I say, unfair. But it was very demoralising.....

This is like being emasculated and I couldn't really understand why, after I'd given so much and I felt I'd delivered a lot.

[Sue, 51]



English Study Work Influences

I was a bit frustrated by what I would say was a bit of a glass ceiling in the organisation, frankly. I was getting less and less comfortable with being in the military part of [company].... I thought the civil division was more about taking people on holiday than it was about dropping bombs on people.... But as it turned out.... the testosterone-fuelled environment that was the civil business, was quite objectionable to me....I wanted to move out completely.

[Sam, 45]



English Study Work Influences

I'd only recently moved up there with a new job, which I was asked to leave, since, anyway, it was not very pleasant... it was obviously before days of law, but I could have made a big, big fuss, and I, and well you're in a very weak position you don't realise that you should have - should and could have made a fuss - until it's too late, and then you go with the flow.

[Debbie, 60]



Australian Stories

Learning across the lifespan

*Older Australian women's careers:
Learning from significant transitions*



The Context: Australian Women

- ❖ increase in Australian women's labour force participation from 43.5% to 58.7% between 1978 and 2009

But

- ❖ other statistics remain of concern in relation to gender equity

(Office for Women in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009)



The Context: Australian Women

- ❖ Australian women are less likely than Australian men to work full-time, and comprise a greater proportion of the part-time workforce
- ❖ women's earnings remain lower than those of men thus placing them at a considerable disadvantage over time
- ❖ occupational segregation still exists
- ❖ female dominated occupations tend to earn less than male dominated occupations
- ❖ women are less likely than men to be found in leadership positions in organisations



Australian Participants Introducing the storytellers

❖ Aged 45 – 65:

45 – 50 (1); 51 – 55 (3); 56 – 60 (2); 61 – 65 (6)

❖ Marital status:

Married (5); Divorced (2); Single (5)

❖ Highest Educational level:

Sub-degree (5); Degree (4); Doctorate (3)

❖ Employment status:

Full time (3); Part-time (4); Retired (2); Student (1);
Unemployed (1); Self-employed (1)



Australian Study Learning across the Lifespan

❖ Learning Pathways

❖ Love of Learning

❖ Traditional Learning Pathways

- ❖ School to further education and no further formal education

❖ Non-Traditional Learning Pathways

- ❖ Early exit from school – formal learning later
- ❖ Gaining higher qualifications
- ❖ Varied patterns of learning
- ❖ Informal learning



Australian Study Learning across the Lifespan

Love of Learning

“I just love learning ... I never went to university so I went straight out of school, I never went to university and I think I had something to prove ... so I needed to have a degree because [occupation] is one thing but it's not a degree, so I needed to have that to prove that I could have gone down that road if I'd chosen”

(Sandra, 45)



Australian Study Learning across the Lifespan

Traditional Learning Pathways

❖ *“in those days you had to get a, you know, your score had to be okay for you had to get a scholarship to teachers college and that committed you then to I think it was two years to work for the government and when I got that I just happy as a bird”*

(Sophia, 63)

❖ *“Forty million courses and seminars and some of them were really, really valuable and very good, and some of them were just rubbish”*

(Sophia, 63)



Australian Study Learning across the Lifespan

Non-Traditional Learning Pathways

- ❖ *“I’m not sure I ever made decisions. I think I’ve fallen into them all, seriously. I didn’t mean to come up here ... that was a friend, I was just coming along for the ride. I got carried away. Same with getting my Senior Certificate, I got carried away. I never intended to do that” (Megan, 54)*
- ❖ *“I think I would’ve been quite good as a plumber ... I think I’m too old to do it now ... Like, at the moment I’m seriously exploring how you become a ferry driver. I’d love to do that part time. You know, something a bit different than head work ” (Kay, 62)*



South African Stories

Social Influences

*Socially embedded career identities:
A voice-centred analysis of the career narratives of
twelve Black South African women*



The Context: South African Women

Towards the ideal

- ❖ “Statistics concerning the economic power of women are staggering: the South African woman is becoming an economic force to be reckoned with”
[Whitehead & Kotze, 2003, p. 77]
- ❖ Women comprise 51,3% of the South African population and 45,1% of the employed population
[Businesswomen’s Association, 2011]



The Context: South African Women

Present realities

- ❖ “Twelve years since the passing of employment equity legislation and affirmative action measures, women continue to be seriously under-represented ... and are a mere 30% of all managers in the workplace. On the other hand, 97% of all domestic workers in South Africa are women.” [Ndungu, 2010]
- ❖ Women constitute less than 10% of CEOs and Chairs of Boards of listed South African entities and state-owned enterprises ... There are 15 CEOs and 18 women chairpersons in the latest census of 339 companies [Businesswomen’s Association, 2011]



South African Participants Introducing the storytellers

- ❖ **Black, Xhosa Speaking**

- ❖ **Aged 45 – 65:**

45 - 50 (9); 51 - 55 (1); 56 - 60 (1); 61 – 65 (1)

- ❖ **Marital status:**

Married (7); Single (4); Widowed (1)

- ❖ **Educational level:**

Sub-Degree (2); Degree (4); Honours (1);

Masters (2); Doctorate (3)

- ❖ **Employment status:**

Full time (10); Student (2)



South African Study Social Influences

- ❖ Cultural perceptions
- ❖ Extended family networks
- ❖ Gender Role Stereotypes



South African Study Social Influences

Cultural perceptions

“... people would admire you but, at the same time, wouldn’t understand that and be supportive of what you do because they don’t see any value in it. So for me it was both from my community and, I guess, at some level my parents were worried about what people say because you are not married, you are not having a child, you are focusing more on your work and these things are outside of the norm ...”

(Noxolo, 45)



South African Study Social Influences

Extended family networks

“ Yes, yes, my mom is still alive and my two sisters, so they depend on me because they are younger than me. I am the first born at home, so they depend on me emotionally and physically because even now I had to speak to my mom before I came here (the university) because she had to tell me that every time she wants to do something, development at home, anything, I am like the husband to her.”

(Minty, 45)



South African Study Social Influences

Gender Role Stereotypes

“... but now with the way that I am dealing with things it is taking time for him (the husband) to gel, saying hold on, you are an African woman, you are married, you are a wife here, so this is how you should do things. So then for me it is to explain and say that this is what I believe in and it will be very much helpful if you can allow me to pursue this and do this... So I always negotiate.”

(Lungsi, 45)



Italian Stories

Intrapersonal Influences

Reflexivity of older women in work and mobility paths: Issues from the Italian cases



The Context: Italian Women

A very relevant difference:

- ❖ Low work rate of Italian women: 47.2% , v/s men 70.3% (Italian National Census Bureau, 2008)
- ❖ Largely below (- 12%) the European average ... mostly linked to the Southern regions' female unemployment rate (20% below the national ratio)
- ❖ Only Malta and Hungary have worse ranking within 27-Europe (Eurostat, 2009)



The Context: Italian Women

- ❖ Negative position in the **Gender Gap Index**: Italy ranked at 74, ... total 134 countries (World Economic Forum, 2010)
- ❖ Quantitative data reflect structural problems, in particular the insufficient level of social services
- ❖ The role of women in society is still weak, despite
 - their better results in school tests
 - the very low birthrate: Italy ranked 183 total 195 countries (CIA World Factbook, 2009)

 “very few jobs and very few kids” at the same time



Italian Participants

Introducing the storytellers

❖ Aged 45 – 65:

45 - 50 (3); 51 - 55 (6); 56 - 60 (3); 61 – 65 (-)

❖ Marital status:

Married (3); Single (8); Widowed (1)

❖ Educational level:

Sub-Degree (5); Degree (6); Honours (-);

Masters (1); Doctorate (-)

❖ Employment status:

Full time (7); Student (-); Part time (4); Unemployed (1)



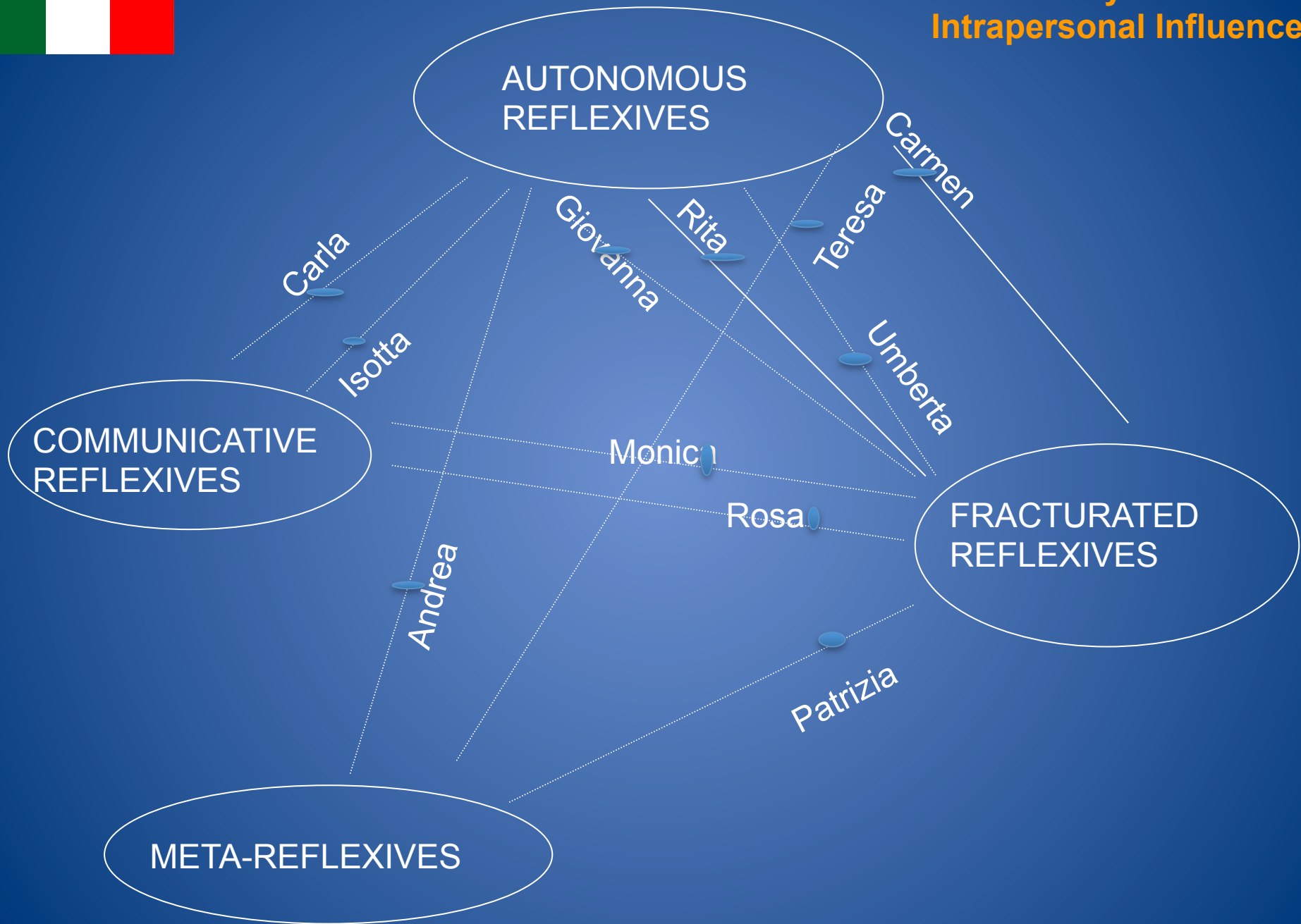
Italian Study

Intrapersonal Influences

- ❖ All “stories” told by interviewed women are in the very end **reflective stories**
- ❖ Methodological question: to what extent such stories reflect some aspects of participants’ **internal conversation**
- ❖ Relevant reference: Margaret Archer’s theory
- ❖ *Reflexivity is a way of thinking about ourselves... the outcome of the **internal conversation** that each human agent develops with herself concerning both the situation in which she is placed and the feelings, visions and projects through which she acts in relation to the external world*
- ❖ 4 main types of “reflexives”: **autonomous; communicative; meta-reflexive; fractured**



Italian Study Intrapersonal Influences





Italian Study Intrapersonal Influences

... an “autonomous reflexive”

I don't go into low-level experiences. I am not conditioned by others. I'm always able to decide what is good for me and to avoid what is not good. Even working as a domestic worker in the hospital was good for me. I would have left the day after being hired if it hadn't been interesting for me. In fact, I did leave when I was transferred to a department for elderly people, where I couldn't stand the sadness of the situation

(Carmen, 55)



Italian Study Intrapersonal Influences

... a “communicative reflexive”

I wanted to earn my money and to show to my family that I was able to live autonomously, even doing the only thing that was possible for an unskilled person like me: working in the cleanings. Now I understand that ... my search for autonomy was illusory: what I really wanted was simply to live with a man and building up a family. And so I did. I got married very young and kept going on with the work in cleaning in order to support my household even after the birth of my daughter.

(Rosa, 47)



Italian Study Intrapersonal Influences

... a “meta-reflexive”

I'm really fond of my new job. I earn very little money in comparison to my previous standards, but I don't care. I think that the shop's Business success has to be linked with other aspects of the co-operative's development such as: better information about the nature of the food that we sell; advertising about our country sites, where the food is produced and that offer different opportunities to the shop's clients in terms of both relax and culture (understanding the production processes in agriculture and breeding); diffusion of new ideas about aware consumptions and the green economy.

(Andrea, 50)



German Stories “Constraint careers”

*Older women’s labour market experiences:
Emerging themes from the German participants*



German Women Labour market context

Male-breadwinner model has structured labour market and social welfare policies in Germany since the post-war period:

- ❖ Gender-specific division of labour (wage earner/domestic work)
- ❖ Gender-specific education and training system (apprenticeships for male and school-based training for female professions)
- ❖ German social welfare system relies on classic commodification pattern (full-time employment)
- ❖ German taxation system favours marital status and (male-)breadwinner model



German Women Labour market context

Labour market developments since the 1970s

- ❖ Female labour force participation has grown from 47% in 1971 to 66 % in 2010
- ❖ Dual breadwinner model, BUT: women remain as *secondary wage earner* (part-time work, atypical employment, confined to lower paid service sector occupations & mini jobs, gender wage gap)
- ❖ Women are significantly disadvantaged in terms of
 - ❖ Occupational status (84% of the female workforce works in the service sector)
 - ❖ Social security and benefits
 - ❖ Career progression possibilities



German Participants Introducing the storytellers

❖ Aged 45 – 65:

45 - 50 (9); 51 - 55 (2); 56 - 60 (1)

❖ Marital status:

Married (5 + 3); Single (4)

❖ Educational level:

Sub-Degree (1); Degree (5); Masters (5 + 1)

❖ Employment status:

Full time (5); Part time (3); Self-employed (3);
Unemployed (1)



German Study Transitions and Responses

Key issues / emerging themes

- ❖ Significant obstacles to redirect career
 - ❖ Requires significant learning efforts / another formal qualification (6 of 12 women went through adult education programmes to do their Masters)
 - ❖ Traditional role models and financial dependency from parents as obstacles to HE
 - ❖ Lack of information and support structures
 - ❖ Realisation of career aspirations or occupational interests later in life (“Constraint Careers”)



German Study Transitions and Responses

“I pretty much knew what I wanted to do I wanted to learn a manual trade and I simply didn’t get an apprenticeship because I was a woman. I bridged this gap by doing au-pair work, writing massive amounts of applications, and then finally did an apprenticeship as a carpenter....

The problem is that no one is really informed. I had to go to the employment office...which was absolutely disastrous....the employees are terribly uninformed ... the whole thing has taken an insane amount of time ... I had to walk through I don’t know how many doors until I finally found someone who said ‘yes, that’s possible’”

(B1, Architect, 47 yrs)



German Study Transitions and Responses

“I started working as an applications programmer, without any experience, and that was very difficult for me. I had done my studies in a similar field, but I did not have any programming experience and it’s not so easy to find your way in the business world when you also have a child. I’m going to have to work full time I am old enough to retire....in our company, you can only take on leadership tasks – endless unpaid overtime and lots of travelling....I don’t feel up to it anymore...”
(B4, Computer Engineer, 52 yrs)



German Study Transitions and Responses

“I knew I wanted to become a master craftsperson ...but I had very little assistance... that was definitely a stumbling block along the way. I got no financial assistance...although later...I met a woman who got support from the government....I don't know how that happened.. It was really expensive.. The federal student support I got was a loan. I am still paying it back now ..If I'd known...I might have thought again before doing it”

(B5, Master Seamstress, 47 yrs)

Possibilities for career guidance and counselling support

- ❖ How relevant is career theory?
- ❖ What could be the role of professional career support?
 - ❖ Holistic approaches
 - ❖ Narrative approaches
 - ❖ Approaches that value the subjective and emotional experience of career transition
 - ❖ A safe space
 - ❖ Systemic interventions (e.g., familial, organisational, policy levels)
 - ❖ Range of roles for career development practitioners (e.g., advocacy)

Possibilities for career guidance and counselling support

- ❖ Underpinning philosophies that inform career guidance need to be considered in relation to the cultural context, before considering practice implications.
- ❖ The tension between the need for mass outreach and the need for individualised focus needs resolution in practice.
- ❖ A need to find a resolution between imposed theory and grounded theory. Our research on women in developing and developed countries is definitely framed in a grounded theory approach.
- ❖ Related to the previous two points, career guidance will also need to address the quantitative /qualitative binary in the developing context.

Possibilities for career guidance and counselling support

- ❖ Addressing the previous point raises a further critical issue of timeframe expectations for developing career guidance frameworks.
- ❖ The implementation of career guidance will involve considering macro and micro-systemic contextual pressures on it in terms of delivery, theory, research and policy.
- ❖ Finally, there will be a need to consider role definitions in the provision of career guidance in developing country contexts, specifically the role of activist in relation to career development practitioners, educationalists and policy makers.



Thank you
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Baie dankie
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