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CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS IN SOCIAL  
WORK, NURSING, AND EDUCATION

*The University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

PH.D.

1980

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS  
IN SOCIAL WORK, NURSING, AND EDUCATION

by  
Sheila K. Collins

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area  
of  
Community and Human Resources

Under the Supervision of Professor Howard Eckel

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 1980

**TITLE**

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS**

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**IN SOCIAL WORK, NURSING AND EDUCATION**

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**BY**

**SHEILA K. COLLINS**

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To the role models of my early life, the women in my family who pursued careers and worked to support themselves and their families, this book is dedicated:

Mary J. Sheehan; secretary, great aunt

Katherine Sheehan Graham; beautician, grandmother

Neva Smith O'Malley; schoolteacher, aunt

Dorothy Josephine Graham; accountant, aunt

Jane Graham Smith; nurse, mother

## Acknowledgments

Those who are owed acknowledgment for their contribution to this work are many. Initial appreciation goes to Rosamarie Meile and her friend Pringle Smith, who first set me down at the kitchen table to talk about "my career."

Gratitude is expressed to my committee members, Will Moreland, Wes Meierhenry, Ezra Kohn, Robert Brown and the chair, Howard Eckel, for their direction and guidance. Special thanks goes to my colleagues in the Sociology Department at Texas Christian University; Barry Tuchfeld, James Henley, Robert Regoli and Edward Lile, who gave of their time and wisdom in specialized areas. To Art Berliner for his assistance in editing and keeping my spirits up, a personal thank you.

The advisory committee who categorized the sample deserve credit; Mildred Hogstel and Kathy Nichols in nursing, Marilyn Farris and Dorothy Sanders in education, and in social work; Ezra Kohn, Ron Burrus and especially Martha Williams, who provided assistance when it was especially critical.

Partial funding for research expenses was provided by the Texas Christian University Research Foundation to whom I express appreciation. Gratitude must also be expressed to the women who gave of their time and personal experiences to participate in this study.

Many others have had a part, large and small, in the production of this work; of special note is Lois Cook, who

typed the drafts as extras in her busy schedule. And to those persons who will remain nameless, who have provided barriers to my career development, for without them this work might never have been written.

Finally, my most heartfelt appreciation to my children, Corinne, Kevin and Kenny, who have accompanied me through three degrees, and to my husband, Richard -- thank you for carrying on without me as I worked in my room this past year, and for always believing that I could do it, no matter how great the task.

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the spectacular increase during the last thirty years in the number and proportion of women who work for pay outside the home, women continue to be under-represented at the top administrative levels of organizations. This situation is particularly startling if we look at professions which have been traditionally defined as "women's professions."

Etzioni (1969), in his volume on what he calls the "semi-professions" of teaching, nursing and social work suggests that the status and organization of these three groups are strongly related to the fact that these organizations are numerically dominated by females. Etzioni describes women as more amenable to administrative control and less conscious of organizational status than men, factors which have hampered professionalization of the fields.

Although dominated numerically by women, as Kadushin (1976) points out, "In all female professions, the administrative level of the organizational hierarchy becomes a male enclave." (p. 444).

So, as Humphrey (1980), the president of the National Association of Social Workers comments, while women suffer from the negative identity attributed to a woman's profession, "the majority of its female practitioners are without the opportunity to provide the leadership and direction of that

profession" (p. 265).

Though historically women were often the founders, leaders and developers of the women's fields, currently women are losing ground regarding leadership positions in all three of the fields. In social work in 1968, 43% of the female social workers had some administrative function while the percentage for men was 58%. Closer examination of the figures reveals that top administrative positions were filled by men who represent 32% of the total profession. Women's administrative responsibilities were most frequently low or middle level supervisory (Stamm, 1969). By 1977, Szokoes studied the decline in percentage of women agency directors and projected that if the trend continues, there will be no women leaders by 1984 (NASW News).

In Nursing, 4% of the females hold administrative positions while 8% of the male nurses are administrators. This is in a profession where only 2% of the total population is male (Holt, 1976). Stevens (1977) pointed out that nursing is losing out in competition with health care administration for top administrative positions, a field which is predominately male.

The field of education provides a demonstration of the fact that the higher the level, the fewer the women. At the elementary level, women are 86% of the total faculty; at secondary, 49%, and at the college and university level, only 27%. (Dept. of Labor, 1975). The decline in women employed as elementary school principals (from 55% in 1928 to 21% in 1971) has not been offset by the slight increase in women serving as

secondary school administrators (from 3.8% in 1961 to 6.5% in 1971). The percent of all women administrators in school districts has dropped to 13 per cent and the ranks appear to be still shrinking (AASA, 1980). As Gross and Track concluded in 1976, "top administrative positions of school systems and of individual schools are disproportionately filled by men" (p. 9).

Given this bleak picture, what are the significant variables that enable some women in these fields to achieve middle and even top level administrative positions? By studying the career development of women in top administrative positions in social work, nursing, and education we could increase our understanding of the fields themselves and hopefully, facilitate the full utilization of women who are employed in them.

#### Research: Women's Career Development

Hanson and Rapoza (1978) define career development as:

A continuous life-long process of learning to manage the developmental tasks of various life stages, integrating the work role with other roles and gaining a sense of agency and self-direction in one's life... (p. xvi).

Most career development theorists have seen women's career development as significantly different from men's. Some theorists have attempted to define the differences which are generally related to sex role socialization and social expectations (Super, 1957; Tiedeman and O'Hara, 1963; Osipow, 1968; Zytowski, 1969).

Societal expectations regarding women's appropriate roles have led to a greater complexity for women's career development



in the following ways:

- 1) Choices: Children perceive fewer career choices for all females than males (Schlossberg and Goodman, 1972). This could be related to a perception of the reality, two-fifths of all women workers are employed in ten occupations (Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau, 1975), as well as stereotyping in educational materials (Weltzman and Rizzo, 1974).
- 2) Career Patterns: Super (1957) identified more variability in career patterns for women including homemaking and work after education but not after marriage (options not generally available to men). Discontinuities or interruptions in the work history often occur for women in relation to child bearing and child rearing.
- 3) Institutional Barriers: Formal and informal practices have been shown to mitigate against women's entering and/or advancing in education (Westervelt, 1975) and employment (Epstein, 1971). In Astin's (1969) study of women doctorates, over 1/3 of the women reported discriminatory practices, with the more professionally active reporting experiences with discrimination most frequently.
- 4) Psychological and Social Factors in Society: Achievement related conflicts in women have been

explored by Horner (1972) as an integral representation of societal attitudes which view certain kinds of achievement as inconsistent with being a female.

This inconsistency in the female role was discovered by Broverman et al. (1970) in a study of views held by mental health professionals. The qualities of a healthy person were synonymous with descriptions of a healthy male, while female qualities were disparate from the view of healthy functioning in general. Attitudes that females hold of other females' accomplishments were explored by Goldberg (1968). When college women were told that an article was written by a woman, they evaluated it more negatively than if they thought it was authored by a man, even when the subject of the article pertained to a woman's profession.

Early studies of women's career development differed from commonly held beliefs about women's lives, yet were at the same time affected by cultural conditioning. Collier (1926) studied women who were wives and mothers while pursuing careers and found that work enriched their lives but support from their husbands was key to their ability to handle domestic chores and the opposition of other relatives.

The Department of Labor sponsored studies in the 60's of particular graduating classes and found a strong interest expressed in employment though less than half the women were employed at the time. Ginzberg's (1966) Columbia graduates had unusual life styles in that 40% did not have children, 25% postponed marriage until thirty and 33% were single.

Rossi (1966) in a critique of the study suggests that mate choice and family size are not contingencies of career development as Ginsburg suggests, "but the consequences of the values they held and the balance they wished between work and family roles" (p. 875).

Astin's (1969) study of women doctorates found 91% of the women in the labor force and slightly over one-half married with smaller families than in the general population.

Hennig's (1970) interview study of 25 top women executives in business contains more in-depth information on the life cycle of career women than the previous studies which utilized survey questionnaires. Unique to this study was the significance of the women's relationship to their fathers and to a male boss who brought the women along with him as he moved upward in the organization. In mid-life, the women experienced a moratorium on career striving and reclaimed the more feminine side of themselves that had been denied in their earlier career strivings.

It is unclear from the previous literature how much of the experiences and strategies of the women studied were tied to the organizations or fields in which they pursued their careers? How important to the outcome of previous studies is the fact that career women were often in numerically male dominated organizations. A male mentor was seen as critical to a woman's success in the business world. Would this be necessary in female dominated fields?

As the role of women in our culture is changing, would the study of a different cohort group ten or twenty years later than these studies yield different results? Finally, all of the studies demonstrated the career advantage of a single or childless life style. Would this hold true for women administrators in female fields as well?

The problem that this study examined was an extension of earlier career development studies of educated career women. The present study examined detailed aspects of the career development experiences of women administrators, in three women's fields and drew comparisons between the fields and between women holding top and middle management positions in the fields.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem that this study addressed was to identify the significant variables that have facilitated the career development of women in social work, nursing and education who presently hold top administrative positions in these fields. The problem of the study might be further clarified by asking a number of questions.

- 1) What supports or encouragement did these subjects experience from their families of origin?
- 2) Did the subjects have experiences in education or sports which facilitated their going beyond cultural sex role limitations?
- 3) Did the subjects select their field or profession initially because it was perceived as compatible with the nurturant role in the culture? If so, what

was involved in their transition to an administrative role?

- 4) What part did economic necessity play in the career decisions of the subjects?
- 5) Did the subjects experience role conflict related to family and work responsibilities? If so, what are the adjustive strategies employed to deal with conflicting demands?
- 6) Did the subjects experience a mentor from inside their organizations who played a significant role in their success?
- 7) What are the career patterns of these subjects in relation to career interruptions and organizational moves?
- 8) Did the subjects experience limitations or difficulties in their careers related to sex discrimination or sexism? If so, what adjustive strategies did they utilize?
- 9) What are the subject's greatest career rewards? What have been the costs?
- 10) What advice do the subjects have for aspiring young women beginning administrative careers in female professions?
- 11) Did the subjects provide assistance to younger women, acting as mentors for others?

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the appropriateness of current theoretical constructs and issues regarding women's career development to top women administrators in social work, nursing, and education. Toward this end and in concert with the research questions previously proposed, the following goals are offered as representing the primary interests of this study.

- 1) To identify and describe the significant factors and events that have facilitated the careers of a national sample of top women administrators in the fields of social work, nursing, and education.
- 2) To extend previous research on women's career development, particularly research on female administrators (Hennig, 1970).
- 3) To determine the extent to which the women administrators experienced barriers to their career development.
- 4) To identify the adjustive strategies utilized by successful women administrators to overcome obstacles to their career goals.

### Rationale

The career development of women administrators in social work, nursing, and education would be expected to differ from populations previously studied, for the following reasons: Although career choices for women have been limited (Super, 1957), social work, nursing, and education have been included

in the range of options available to young women (Epstein, 1971) Experiences in growing up as young women would prepare them for consideration of the women's fields (O'Hara, 1962) and cultural values might more readily encourage careers in this fields.

Since, according to Etzioni (1969) administrators are generally selected from the professional population, and women numerically dominate these fields, women may have support and encouragement to become leaders, or at least more opportunity than in male dominated fields. Finally, women administrators in women's professions must move from a direct service role, compatible with sex role socialization, to a less compatible one of directing and leading. For many women this could be a mid-career re-direction, the nature of which is little understood.

Some further considerations make a study of top women administrators in social work, nursing and education particularly appropriate at this time. Since the status of women in American life has been changing rapidly, new cohort groups must be studied in order to examine the developmental process of growth as it relates to societal processes (Van Dusen, 1976). Howe (1975) has suggested that the status of professional women might be more easily improved by focusing on occupational areas where women already are qualified and employed in large numbers rather than in fields where women are still a small minority or "token" phenomena.

## Barriers and Adjustive Strategies

Major barriers or difficulties to women's career development have been documented in career development and sociological literature and can be summarized in the following manner:

- 1) Role conflict between family and work responsibilities. Coser and Rokoff (1971) see family and career conflict as a logical consequence of women's cultural mandate that their primary allegiance be to the family. Professional women are also expected to be committed to their work as men are, and these values are contradictory. Hall (1972) researched coping behaviors of educated women related to work/family role conflict and discovered satisfaction related to the simple act of coping rather than the particular strategy employed. Hoffelder (1964) studied 4,039 married women teachers and found 46% of them had "serious" or "some" conflict between work and family responsibilities. Theriault (1957) studied nurses who would not give up their careers but felt that their families needed to come first. Tropman's (1968) study of married social workers found little role conflict until he divided the group into service-oriented and intellectually-oriented women, with the latter group describing role conflict. He reasoned that for the intellectually-oriented women, rather than seeing her work as an extension of her culturally