CHAPTER 7

MARY MCMAHON, MARK WATSON & JENNY BIMROSE

OLDER WOMEN'S CAREERS: SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVES

Emily was in her mid-fifties, married with two adult children. After completing school, Emily accepted a cadetship to work while studying in a technical field. Emily found the work quite interesting, but she dropped out of the formal study component because she felt she had no aptitude for it. This meant that she could not progress in her field. While working, she began part-time study in an area that she was interested in and subsequently relocated with her partner to another country to be closer to relatives and to continue her study full time. She then obtained two postgraduate qualifications. When her children were young, her husband was diagnosed with a medical condition that meant he was permanently unable to work. Realising that she now needed to support her family, Emily completed a professional qualification in order to obtain a job that offered reasonable employment conditions. While her children were little, she worked in part-time and casual positions. After several years of part-time, contract and casual work with the same employer, she contacted her union who assisted her to obtain a permanent position that she remained in for almost 20 years. Although Emily could do the job well and demonstrated good outcomes, she did not have a natural affinity for it and explained:

I did find it pretty hard. It was something I had to do for the family so I did it because I just had to." She described how "I felt trapped in the job. Because I had to do it. I felt like I had no choice because I needed to be here to support the family and it would be fairly disastrous if I wasn't doing that. So it was a matter of, well you've got to work and this is your job so just get on with it and do it. I think that kept me going … it just required a huge amount of mental effort I suppose and energy to keep on top.

Emily has been diagnosed and treated for a medical problem that for several years affected her capacity to work despite treatment. Faced with the possibility of not working again, despite submitting "*dozens*" of applications, Emily concluded:

See the problem was that when I left school I never knew what I wanted to do … I suppose in a way I feel a bit sad that I feel my life has gone in directions that weren't of much use in some way. That I could have been in happier places

instead of wasting my time … it's not worth staying in a job where you're unhappy because eventually that will – well that will affect all areas of your life.

Emily was however, optimistic about her life and her future and had found a hobby that she was passionate about. She explained "*my spiritual life has somewhat expanded and grown from this experience*" and, in regard to her limited financial resources, concluded that:

We don't go out and we have no money for that and that's fine with me … There's a great life out there for people who don't work. We have the most wonderful cultural resources here for people with no income … It's a bus ride away … I don't feel like we're missing out on anything … I'm very happy to explore this next phase of my life.

INTRODUCTION

Emily's story illustrates the multifaceted nature of women's career development. In particular, it highlights the fragmented, family oriented, non-traditional, non-linear paths that are associated with the careers of many older women. Emily's career suggests that a career theory base predicated on accounts of personal traits and discrete stages is inadequate to accommodate the complex careers of women, and that more flexible and holistic theories are needed. This chapter considers extant career theory in relation to women's career development and suggests a theoretical perspective that may more adequately portray women's career development. Specifically, the chapter considers the need for women's career development to be considered systemically. In this regard, the Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 2006) of career development is proposed as a lens through which to view women's career development. Importantly, the Systems Theory Framework also offers suggestions regarding its practical application to the provision of career guidance and counselling support for women.

CAREER THEORY: SYSTEMIC APPROACHES

Patton and McMahon (2006) assert that career theory in general still fails to accommodate the realities of women's lives in a postmodern career world. There remains ambiguity as to whether career theory can generalise across the widely divergent contexts within which career development takes place. This ambiguity is evident in the career theory literature in different ways. For instance, there has been a consistent trend in career theory development to separate the career development of women by designating women as representative of some special group. Such a theoretical trend demonstrates less of a concern for the development of a holistic theoretical perspective on women's career development and more of a concern about justifying the generalisation of a particular career theory to populations other than

for whom the theory was developed for. On the other hand, there is a longstanding debate about whether a separate career theory is needed for women and whether such a theoretical move would be perceived as downgrading women's career developmental issues (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

As career theory has evolved through theory refinement and the introduction of new theories, there is widespread agreement that career development is unique to each person. This perspective is reflected in ecological and systemic theories, the focus of this chapter, which consider individuals in context. Thus they offer a way of understanding the complexity of women's career development, and in particular, they address the need to contextualise women's careers as they develop across time. Ecological and systemic theories acknowledge contextual influences that are important to consider in women's career development as they accommodate familial change, multiple roles, care giving responsibilities (August, 2011) and processes such as career transition. For example, Cook, Heppner and O'Brien (2002a, 2002b) in their ecological model of women's career development emphasised the importance of women's multiple life roles and the way in which women define themselves in relational rather than individualistic ways. Similarly, Patton (1997) considered the contextual location of women's career development from the perspective of systems theory. Specifically, she described the individual and contextual factors that inhibit and facilitate women's career development through the lens of the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006) of career development. This framework will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

The Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2006) of career development represents career development through an 'individual in context' perspective. Patton and McMahon present the STF as a metatheory that accommodates a broad range of perspectives on career development. Indepth explanations of specific aspects of career development may be accounted for by existing theories. The STF locates individuals, as represented by the *individual system*, centrally in a complex context of three interconnected systems of influence. Essentially, the STF (see Figure 1) views individuals as unique systems comprised of personal characteristics, or traits, as they have been described in career development theory. Traits such as personality, values, and interests as depicted in the STF have been a feature of career theory and assessment for a long time. The STF also depicts traits that have been largely ignored in career theory and career research such as disability and sexual orientation. In addition, gender is represented as an individual influence.

The influences of the individual system have provided the primary focus of many psychological career theories such as that of Holland (1985a). Moreover, such theories have stimulated the development of a broad range of career assessment instruments. The application of career assessment has resulted in an approach to career guidance
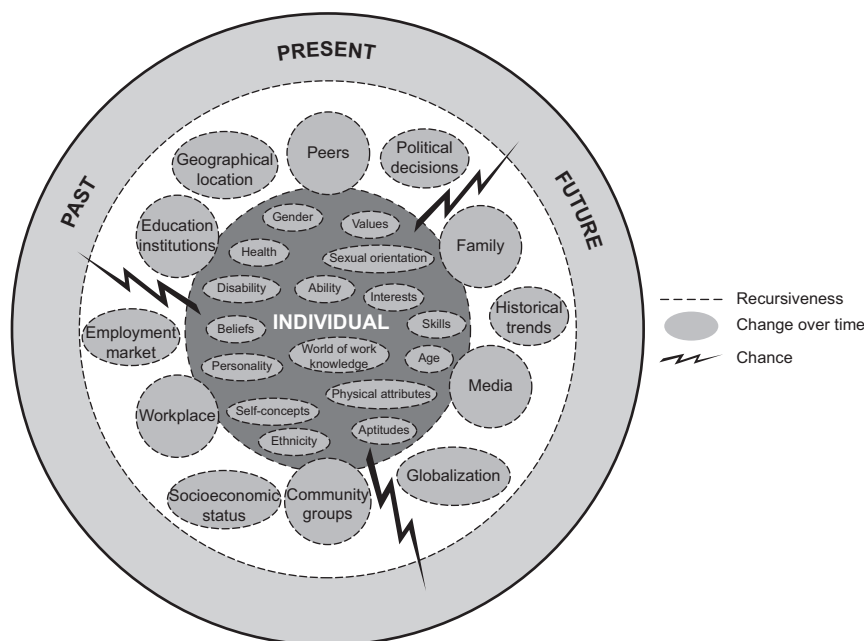
Figure 1. The systems theory framework of career development. Copyright © Patton and McMahon 1999.

and counselling based on matching. For example, Holland's theory concerns interests and he developed the career assessment instrument, the Self-Directed Search (SDS; Holland, 1985b), which essentially matches individuals to occupations on the basis of their SDS results. Such approaches assume that individuals have choice and are able to realise the occupations suggested by the assessment results. Importantly, the STF illustrates the narrowness of such theoretical approaches and the practices that they inform as they largely ignore the broader context depicted by the STF. This is particularly important in relation to women, whose choices may be constrained by their gender role socialisation, age, discriminatory practices, cultural beliefs, and familial responsibilities.

Because individuals do not live in isolation, the individual system is represented within a broader system of influences, the contextual system. Within the contextual system are the social and environmental-societal systems. The *social system* considers the roles and relationships of individuals in the context of families, peers, workplaces, educational institutions, and community groups as well as the influence of the media. Much less attention has been paid to the influences of the social system by career theory. While context has been widely acknowledged, especially in more recent career theories, few explanations have been offered about how contextual

influences manifest in the career development of individuals. This point emphasises how career theory may be less applicable to women whose careers are relational and significantly influenced by familial roles and responsibilities.

At a broader level, the *environmental-societal system* (Patton & McMahon, 2006) considers individuals within the context of their socioeconomic status, geographic location, employment market, as well as in the context of political decisions, historical trends and globalisation. In general, these influences may seem more remote from individuals and have largely been ignored by psychological career theory and most career counselling models. This point is particularly pertinent to the career development of women where macrosystemic factors have been restrictive, prescriptive and discriminatory throughout history. Thus the career development of older women has been constrained by environmental-societal factors.

The influences represented in the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems are termed content influences. Importantly, the STF also considers the process of career development through the inclusion of the process influences of change over time, recursiveness and chance. Thus the three interconnected systems are located within *the context of time* which indicates the lifelong nature of career development. Past, present and future represents the process of *change over time* and the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the influences contained within the STF. Career development has been accounted for in the context of time by stage based theories such as those of Super (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) and Gottfredson (2005) which essentially describe a linear normative career development process. The stages of Super's theory have been criticised as being more applicable to men than women. Super does however pay significant attention to life roles in various contexts including families. An important feature of Gottfredson's theory which applies to children and adolescents is its emphasis on the gender role socialisation that occurs in early childhood. This suggests that early intervention is needed in order for children not to eliminate occupations from consideration on the basis of gender from a very young age. Thus early gender role socialisation may offer some partial explanation about the employment of women in primarily social occupations such as teaching and nursing.

The influence of the process of *chance* is also represented to indicate the sometimes unpredictable nature of career development as a result of unanticipated occurrences. Women's need to be responsive to familial events, for example, suggests that the influence of chance may be of particular relevance to their career development. The STF uses the construct of *recursiveness* to account for the process of dynamic interaction within and between influences. Recursiveness is particularly relevant in the career development of women where the intersection of influences such as gender with for example, age, socioeconomic status, culture or geographic location may have profound impact (e.g., Moore, 2009). Thus the STF accommodates the content influences that have traditionally been well accounted for in career psychology theory such as personality and interests and also draws our attention to a breadth of content influences that have traditionally not been well attended

to, if at all, by psychological career theory. In addition, a strength of the STF is its recognition of the dynamic and interactive nature of contextual influences on career development.

The contextual location of women's careers is most comprehensively understood by assuming a multidisciplinary perspective that may be accommodated by the Systems Theory Framework, one of whose features is its metatheoretical dimension. For example, labour market theory, economics, and sociology together provide a depth and breadth of understanding that is not possible through psychological theory alone. Psychological theory predominantly focuses on the individual system of influences, whereas labour market theory, economics and sociology focus more on influences of the broader social system such as families and the environmental-societal systems such as government policy, employment market trends, and the impact of socioeconomic status. Importantly, these disciplines also offer a longitudinal perspective by tracking the status of women over time. Together, these disciplines provide a comprehensive understanding of women's career development. A brief overview of perspectives from labour market theory, economics, and sociology relevant to the career development of women will now be presented.

Despite the introduction of equal employment legislation in many countries, gender inequality remains entrenched (United Nations, 2010). For example, the International Labour Office concluded in their report 'Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges' that:

> the circumstances of female employment – the sectors where women work, the types of work they do, the relationship of women to their jobs, the wages they receive – bring fewer gains (monetarily, socially and structurally) to women than are brought to the typical working male (p. xi).

Specifically, the types of work women do are still concentrated in a more limited range of occupational sectors such as care workers, clerical workers and service and sales workers (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions ([EFILWC], 2009).

In relation to older women, the context of their employment history over time and current government policies related to retirement are particularly pertinent. Many older women began their careers prior to the introduction of equal opportunity legislation and many were required to resign from their employment when they married or became pregnant. A pervasive feature of older women's career trajectories is one of fragmented, casual, and part-time employment. Thus, as older women face retirement they are likely to be in less secure financial positions than men. In Europe for example, older women workers are more likely to work part time or on temporary or insecure contracts than men of the same age. Within families where there are care roles to be fulfilled, it is more likely that older women will assume the dual role of caring and working than older men (EFILWC, 2009).

Most of all, women's career development is best understood through the stories of women themselves as will be evident in the career development of Jane which

will now be described. Throughout Jane's story, the complex interconnectedness of multiple influences identified in the STF will be demonstrated in brackets.

Jane is an older single parent of two children. One of her sons is an unemployed adult who studies part-time, while the other son is presently completing his high school. Jane adopted her brother's grandchild shortly after she was born in order to provide her with better educational opportunities in life. Jane's two sisters are both pensioned and they are financially dependent on Jane to subsidise their living costs **(social system – family, children, siblings; environmental-societal system – socioeconomic; recursiveness)**. Jane has several qualifications from her local university **(social system – education institutions; environmental-societal system – geographic location; recursiveness)**. Jane struggles with the role of being the sole breadwinner:

> *With so many people that are looking upon you for assistance, especially financially"* and she feels the personal strain of coping: *"you sometimes keep up that face so that they do not see that you are also struggling because if you are struggling financially and they can see it, it is going to affect them* **(social system – family children, siblings; environmental-societal system – socioeconomic; recursiveness)**.

Financial concerns have remained a major consideration throughout Jane's career development. Thus she tried to balance fulltime work with part-time work in order to supplement her income but found that this "*now meant to me that less time with my family*". This situation precipitated a career change in which she moves into teaching as a more stable financial environment **(environmental-societal system – socioeconomic)**.

Jane is now employed as a teacher having previously been a qualified social worker. She feels she is now in the right career environment: "*immediately I started with academic I felt that this is where I belong and I need to actually expand my horizons within the frame of this institution*" **(individual system – interests, beliefs, values; social system – workplace; recursiveness)**. Jane has an active community role and is a committee member of an outreach programme for pregnant teenagers **(social system – community)**. At times Jane feels that she has role overload and she struggles to meet the varying responsibilities of her different life roles: "*they might clash somewhere but I try and maintain some balance … and I don't want any one of those to undermine the other one*" **(social system – family, workplace; recursiveness)**.

Jane's brother has acted as a "*sort of a guide to my life*" and he advised her to pursue a career in social work rather than her preferred option of teaching as he argued that it was a better springboard to other career directions in the future. There were also more readily available bursaries to pursue study in this direction **(social system – family; environmental-societal system – socioeconomic; recursiveness)**.

Jane believes that it important to express one's opinions in the workplace ("*Wrong is wrong, right is right with me*") and she is aware that this has made her unpopular

with work colleagues several times **(social system – workplace; individual system – beliefs, values; recursiveness)**. Jane understands her outspokenness as resulting from her upbringing where she was one of 9 children:

> *I am from a rough environment because if I can tell you, we are eleven people at home and ...I grew up in that situation, that I am the youngest but I must think about being the equal with them. So my transition in my work environment was like that and I think at times I would come over too strong* **(social system – workplace, family; individual system – beliefs, values; context of time – past influencing present; recursiveness)**.

There was also jealousy concerning Jane's motivation to achieve. For instance, Jane was the first social worker to be granted fulltime study leave and her goal-directed behaviour towards further professional training was resented by some of her work colleagues **(social system – workplace)**. Her further studies gave her a sense of guilt in relation to her mothering role **(social system – workplace, family, education institutions; individual system – beliefs, values; recursiveness)**. Thus Jane describes how her young son would "*sleep underneath my desk when I was busy writing ... now I realise that he was trying to say to me that I am missing you but I am too busy ... to give him that attention*". Jane also faced discrimination when she sought promotion posts. On the other hand, Jane has gained great satisfaction from helping people as part of her work and making a difference to their lives.

Jane is able to reflect on how her own upbringing has impacted on her career development:

> *I think that everything that I did comes from my background because I am from a very poor family. My mother never went to school. My father, the highest education he had was a standard two and my father had to leave school to go and take care of his brothers and sisters* **(individual system – beliefs, values; social system – family; environmental-societal system – socioeconomic status; context of time – past influencing present; recursiveness)**.

It is not only family that has influenced her career but also the lack of formal career assistance. In this regard, Jane notes: "*I wanted sort of some guidance, somebody to help me into thinking*".

Reflecting on her career development, Jane wondered about her over commitment to a number of roles and the skewed participation that this resulted in: "*The only thing that I can think of now is to schedule because I took a lot of my children's time. I took a lot of my own time for my studies*" **(social system – workplace, family; recursiveness)**. In terms of her general coping, Jane expressed the philosophy that she needed to "*get away from negativeness because negativeness is going to make you a baby all the time and we don't want to be babies, we want to move and get somewhere*" **(social system –family; individual system – beliefs, values; context of time – past and present influencing future; recursiveness)**.

Jane's career story demonstrates quite clearly the significant systemic influences that can impact on women's career development. Further, it is not only the influences per se that are critical in understanding her career development, but also the intricate recursive connectedness of those influences which compound career decisions and transitions. The dynamic nature of career development depicted in the STF through its process influences of change over time and recursiveness is amply illustrated in Jane's story. In particular, the interplay of different influences at various stages of Jane's life is evident throughout her story. Even though influences may appear more than once, it is important to realise that the nature of those influences changes. For example, as a younger person, the influence of family related to the support of her brother and at the present time it relates to her need to support her children and her two sisters. Similarly, the influence of socioeconomic status at a younger age referred to Jane's need to obtain a bursary in order to be able to study, whereas at the present stage of her career, socioeconomic status relates to having a professional occupation, that earns a high enough income to meet the financial costs of her dependents. Thus family and socioeconomic influences are intertwined. Moreover, Jane's ability to obtain qualifications that enabled her to secure such an occupation is also an influencing factor.

The process influence of recursiveness is a significant contribution of the STF in that it accommodates the individual's subjective career. For example as a result of her familial, community and financial demands, Jane describes her career in terms of "role overload" and "struggling". Thus the traditional emphasis of career guidance and counselling on objectivity and rationality that has been widely criticised is inadequate to fully understand or empathise with Jane's career story. Essentially, career guidance and counselling must be informed by theory but at a practical level, personalised for individuals rather than be driven by formulaic approaches such as some traditional career assessment models; Jane's plea for "guidance, someone to help me into thinking" necessitates a sensitive and holistic approach to career guidance and counselling.

Career guidance and counselling support is based largely on psychological accounts of career development which do not adequately take account of the contextual background to women's career development that is made so graphic through labour market statistics, economics and sociology. Related to this, is the recognised limitation of career theory and practice that it does not adequately take account of the complex and dynamic interplay of individuals and their environments (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002a). Thus, Jane's story suggests that career guidance and counselling approaches predicated on the psychological model of assessment and prediction may not be well suited to women. Further, it suggests that the career decisions of women are best understood in the context of their system of influences. Thus career services for women need to be contextualised within the story of their individual career development. Indeed, career services for older women will be most meaningful when they are tailored to the specific needs of older women at specific stages of their career development.

CAREER SERVICES FOR WOMEN: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A number of suggestions have been made that have relevance to the provision of career services for women. One suggestion that career counselling approaches emphasise relationships (e.g., Cook et al., 2002a) and value the stories of women (McMahon, Watson, & Bimrose, 2012) is particularly appropriate. Other suggestions have been made that systemic interventions need to create healthy work environments and access to role models and mentors (e.g., August, 2011; Cook et al., 2002a). There is a case for career practitioners to be prepared for and to assume a broader range of roles such as that of advocate (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; McMahon, Bimrose, & Watson, 2010). Career counselling approaches that could best support women will now be considered. Subsequently a range of career service possibilities that could support women's career development will be considered through the case study of Debbie.

Approaches to career counselling that emphasise relationships and story are typified by narrative career counselling which is having an increasing influence in career practice. In addition, narrative career counselling is holistic in its 'individual in context' perspective that is consistent with systems theory. Narrative career counselling is predicated on the establishment of a collaborative client-counsellor relationship and it is underpinned by the core constructs of connectedness, meaning making and agency. Connectedness is a multidimensional construct that locates individuals within their environments. Narrative career counsellors actively seek to assist clients to tell stories about their experiences from which they identify themes and patterns that have relevance to their career development. In doing so narrative career counsellors facilitate a meaning making process in which individuals make sense of their experiences. Importantly, narrative career counselling believes in the capacity of individuals to take an active and agentic role in the career counselling process and in the construction of their careers.

A strength of the STF is its application to practice. The STF is applied to career counselling through its story telling approach. Consistent with other narrative approaches to career counselling, the story telling approach places value on the client-counsellor relationship and respects clients as experts who are actively involved in the construction of their career. In addition to being underpinned by the narrative career counselling core constructs of connectedness, meaning making and agency, the story telling approach also emphasises reflection and learning. As such, relational approaches are particularly appropriate for women.

The story of Debbie demonstrates that career services would be needed as a result of systemic influences on Debbie's career development within all three system levels of the STF. In addition, as can be seen below, there is a recursive element to the provision of such services over the course of a woman's career. Although Debbie had received no career guidance and counselling support during her career, we have identified in Debbie's story below the particular points at which career services could have been provided and the possible nature of those services. These we have numbered and discussed below the story.

Debbie, a 60 year old married woman, is in fulltime employment in tertiary education and has three grown-up children. She has held a wide variety of work positions since she graduated from university in her early twenties **(1)**. Some of Debbie's work has been in full time employment, some has been of short-term duration and other employment has involved "*bits and pieces that were done in parallel with each other*".

Debbie explains her earlier career changes as resulting from geographic movement in order to accommodate her husband's career path: "*that's why it chopped and changed quite quickly, every two years at a different place type of thing*". Debbie's employment history involved a break of eight years while she was a fulltime mother and housewife (although she undertook voluntary school and community work during these years). During the early years of establishing their family, Debbie began to re-seek part-time or halftime employment which involved a decade of various work settings **(2)**. After that Debbie sought more permanent employment which culminated in this phase of her career development in a management position at a college working with disabled adult students. Debbie views this career move as "*a big mistake*" as she realised early on that she was somebody who could not "*cope with people coming in in floods of tears in my office*" **(3)**. She resigned from this position after a few months.

Debbie wishes that she could make more sense of her multiple career moves **(4)**. In retrospect she thinks that some of her career changes could be attributed to necessity and some to a theme that she identifies as "*supporting the underdog*". A theme that Debbie identifies in her paid work activities was the satisfaction she gained from having the autonomy to "*think and do things that I felt were right for the situation*". Debbie felt uncomfortable about the temporary and even unpaid nature of some of her working activities: "*lack of security was something that was difficult for me*". On the other hand, Debbie enjoyed voluntary work and felt that it simply grew over time, that it was "*a creeping thing, I suppose*".

More recently Debbie has considered trying to establish a balance between paid and unpaid work: "*I'm doing it an in incremental way, I think, or I hope – it's a kind of mixture of little things*", although she is less sure that her husband is receptive to this latest career conceptualisation: "*I think that's a more primeval thing there, you know ... I think he's a little bit unsettled about me down-incoming*" **(5)**.

Reflecting on her varied career history, Debbie sees herself as someone who lacked a "*central plan*" and that the reasons for some of her changes were as varied as the changes themselves: "*perhaps get a little bit more money, a bit more security, or meet different people, or just try something different ... I'm happy flitting*" **(6)**. Debbie concludes that what has made most of her career transitions possible are supportive networks: "*I kind of understood how to make networks. I think that's one of the keys to transition, is making the right networks for the right situation*".

A case for the provision of lifelong career guidance and counselling support is evident in the story of Debbie. As indicated in the boldface coding above, there are various times in Debbie's career story when she may have benefited from career

guidance and counselling support. Such support could be in the form of individual intervention (i.e., a career practitioner interacting with Debbie) or systemic intervention (i.e., interventions for the benefit of an individual). Below are examples of types of interventions that could have been provided for Debbie during her career and these are described according to the STF's systems of influence.

(1) The first example of when career support could have been provided is during Debbie's university years. Such support could have been provided in the *social system* by the education institution or at an *individual systems* level with Debbie herself. At the social systems level, career programs built into the education curriculum that assisted all students with career decision making and transition from university to the world of work may have been beneficial to Debbie. For example, Debbie may have benefited from programs of work integrated learning or mentoring from women who worked in fields similar to her areas of interest. At an individual level, Debbie may have benefited from career counselling. The latter intervention may have resulted in Debbie understanding more about herself and where her talents were best directed. In essence, Debbie left university without a plan, something she realised later in life that may have been useful to her.

(2) The second example of when career support may have benefited Debbie was when she wanted to return to work after an eight year break raising her family. Women returning to work after periods of child rearing and family duties face challenging situations where their skills and knowledge may no longer be current, their resumes are out of date, they have lost touch with the employment market and their networks, and their occupational field may have moved on. Further, women who have extended periods of timeout of the workforce have re-defined themselves in roles such as mother, volunteer, and community worker and thus many have lost confidence in themselves as a result of being out of paid employment.

Women sometimes do not return to work at the same level at which they left it. The issue of women returning to work after periods of child raising may be viewed at an *individual systemic* issue for women such as Debbie and also at *social system* level of family, and at the broader *environmental-societal system* level through the loss of women's potential productivity and contribution to the employment market. Their reduced level of participation may have implications for the socioeconomic status of families and may mean that women are less well set up financially for their later retirement because of a loss of benefits such as superannuation and pension funds. Because of the widespread nature of this issue in communities, this suggests that at the *environmental-societal system* level, that government policy needs to provide systemic interventions such as workforce re-entry programs and support for women returning to work. This example also highlights the need for interventions at the environmental-societal system and social system levels that support the careers of women through policy and practices related to flexible working hours, the promotion of healthy and safe working environments, provision of child care, paid eldercare leave, recruitment and retention (August, 2011; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002a).

130

(3) The third example of when career support may have benefited Debbie is at the social system level of the workplace. In her workplace, Debbie found herself stressed and felt she was not suited for the work she was required to do. This led to her resigning which came at personal cost (individual system) and also represented a loss to the organisation which had invested in her (social system). While Debbie was struggling with her work, had career guidance and counselling been available and/ or provided to Debbie within the workplace (social system), this may have resulted in a more positive resolution of her work situation. For example, other roles may have been available to her to transition within the organisation or she may have been assisted to transition more positively from the organisation. Further, had Debbie accessed career guidance and counselling support within the organisation if it was available, a career practitioner may have been able to advocate for her. For example, advocacy could have sought out other opportunities for Debbie in the organisation, a greater level of support for her, or mentoring to assist her in her job.

(4) The fourth example of when career support may have been beneficial to Debbie relates to the lack of security she felt as a result of the temporary and unpaid nature of some of her work. Had adult guidance services been available in the community through either drop-in centres, telephone help-lines, or online support, Debbie may have accessed them and may have been able to make "more sense of her multiple career moves". The provision of adult career guidance and counselling support may be provided through government policy and initiatives at the environmental-societal system level. A consequence of such policy initiatives is its recursive impact at the social system level through the establishment of service providers for the benefit of individuals (individual system).

(5) The fifth example of when career support may have been beneficial for Debbie is in the example of her trying to balance her paid and unpaid work and her husband's reservations about this. Traditionally career guidance and counselling has been provided to individuals, but Debbie's case indicates that there are times when intervention in the social system such as families may also need to occur. For example, Debbie and her husband may have benefited at the individual system level from discussing her future work plan with a career practitioner.

(6) The sixth example demonstrates the concept of the need for the provision of career guidance and counselling support across the lifespan. For example, at age 60, in reflecting on her career Debbie recognises that she had no career plan. Had career support been available to her as an adolescent at school, as a young adult at university, and as an adult at various stages and settings in adulthood, Debbie's career development may have been different. From an STF perspective, this illustrates the recursiveness of past, present and future. For example, Debbie's past career decisions and experiences were strongly related to her present career situation and to her future.

Debbie's story and the subsequent discussion of career services have highlighted how women's career development could be supported by a range of individual and systemic interventions. Women's career support needs emerge at all ages and stages

of life as a result of the dynamic interaction between them and their systems of influence. Career support needs may be person specific or they may apply more generally to all women. Thus career services must necessarily be multifaceted and include those accessible to women individually such as career counselling and those more widely available such as work re-entry or mentoring programs.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered the complexity of women's career development from a systemic perspective. In doing so, it has demonstrated how systemic factors can impact on the career development of women across their lifespan. Describing women's career development from a systemic perspective allows us to identify the nature of systemic influences on women's career development as well as consider possible career guidance and counselling support services that might be required.

Clearly there is a need to consider the career development of women more holistically if the realities of their career development are to be addressed and redressed. Career theories and practices that accommodate the multifaceted nature of women's career development may meaningfully assist them to consider contextual influences on their career development. The case of Jane clearly demonstrates this need when she says: "*I wanted sort of some guidance, somebody to help me into thinking*". Similarly Debbie, on reflecting on her career development came to the conclusion that she had lacked a "*central plan*".

Career guidance and counselling services were clearly lacking in the cases of all three older women presented in this chapter. There was personal awareness of the need for such services, and indeed personal motivation to participate in career guidance and counselling. In reflecting on her career development, Emily reflected that she *"could have been in happier places instead of wasting my time"*. In the case studies presented in this chapter the practical application of the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon, 2006) demonstrates the usefulness of incorporating systemic perspectives in career theory and practice.

REFERENCES

Arthur, N., & McMahon, M. (2005). Multicultural career counseling: Theoretical applications of the Systems Theory Framework. *The Career Development Quarterly, 53*, 208–222.

August, R.A. (2011). Women's later life career development: Looking through the lens of the kaleidoscope career model. *Journal of Career Development, 38*, 208–236.

Bimrose, J. (2008). *Guidance with Women* (1st ed.). Dordrecht: Springer.

Bimrose, J. (2004). Sexual harassment in the workplace: an ethical dilemma for career guidance? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 32*(1), 109–123.

Bimrose, J. (2001). Girls and women: challenges for careers guidance practice. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 29*(1), 79–94.

Cook, E.P., Heppner, M.J., & O'Brien, K.M. (2002a). Career development of women of colour and white women: Assumptions, conceptualization, and interventions from an ecological perspective. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *50*, 291–305.

Cook, E.P., Heppner, M.J., & O'Brien, K.M. (2002b). Feminism and women's career development: An ecological perspective. In S.G. Niles (Ed.), Adult career development: Concepts, issues and practices (3rd ed., pp. 168–189). Alexandria, VA: National Career Development Association.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2009). *Foundation Findings: Drawing on experience – Older women workers in Europe*. Retrieved from http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2008/85/en/2/EF0885EN.pdf.

Farmer, H.S. (1997). *Diversity & Women's Career Development* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gottfredson, L.S., (2005). Applying Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise in career guidance and counseling. In S.D. Brown & R.W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 71–100). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Holland, J.L. (1985a). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Holland, J.L. (1985b). *The Self-Directed Search: A guide to educational and vocational planning*. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

International Labour Office. (2010). *Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges*. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_elm/---trends/documents/publication/wcms_123835.pdf

McMahon, M., Bimrose, J., & Watson, M. (2010). Older women's career development and social inclusion. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 19*(1), 63–70.

McMahon, M., Watson, M., & Bimrose, J. (2012). Career adaptability: A qualitative understanding from the stories of older women. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 80*, 762–768.

Moore, S. (2009). 'No matter what I did I would still end up in the same position': Age as a factor defining older women's experience of labour market participation. *Work, Employment and Society, 23*, 655–671.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2006). *Ageing and Employment Policies. Live Longer, Work Long.* Paris: OECD Publications.

O'Neil, D.A., Hopkins, M.M., & Bilimoria, D. (2008). Women's careers at the start of the 21st century: Patterns and paradoxes. *Journal of Business Ethics, 80*(4), 727–743.

Patton, W. (1997). Women's career development. In W. Patton & M. McMahon (Eds.), *Career development in practice: A systems theory perspective* (pp. 37–46). North Sydney, Australia: New Hobsons Press.

Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Super, D.E., Savickas, M.L., & Super, C.M. (1996). The life-span, life-space approach to careers. In D. Brown & L Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (3rd ed., pp. 121–178). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

United Nations. (2010). *Facts & Figures on Women Worldwide*. Retrieved from http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/UNWomen_FactsAndFiguresOnWomen_20100702.pdf

AFFILIATIONS

Mary McMahon
The University of Queensland, Australia

Mark Watson
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa

Jenny Bimrose
University of Warwick, England