Super’s Career Stages and the Decision to Change Careers

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This study examined Super’s (1990) concept of recycling through the stages of adult career development in a sample of 226 Australian men and women who were approximately evenly distributed across the following four steps in the uptake of a second career: (a) contemplating a change, (b) choosing a new field, (c) implementing a change, and (d) change fully completed. A group of adults of similar age, gender, education, occupation, and career history who had no intention of switching careers was also included for comparison. Recycling predictions were supported by the finding that the three groups who were in the throes of career change displayed greater concern with Super’s first (exploration) stage than the nonchanging control group. In addition, the two groups who were most intensely involved in the change process (choosing field and implementing) scored higher in exploration concern than the group whose career change was fully completed. Satisfaction also varied as a function of the participant’s stage in the process of switching to a new career. Global satisfaction with the present job was highest in workers who had completed the change to a new career, but nonchangers were more satisfied than the three groups who were actively caught up in the change process. On the other hand, satisfaction with the overall pattern of career development was higher in the two stable groups (nonchangers and change-completed) than among the three groups still actively involved in making a change. Implications of these results for midlife career counseling were considered.
CAREER STAGES

the psychological changes achieved by passing successfully through a given stage are not necessarily permanent. Super’s theory posits four stages of adult career development: (a) exploration, (b) establishment, (c) maintenance, and (d) disengagement. Since only the first three span the employed portion of the life cycle, these three are the main focus of the present study.

Super (1990) argued that the timing of transitions between career stages was more a function of the individual’s personality and life circumstances than of chronological age. For example, while one person might complete the developmental tasks associated with his first stage of exploring career alternatives and selecting a vocation between the traditionally normative ages of 14 and 25 years and, by remaining in the same career throughout working life, might later pass through each further stage just once before retiring at age 65, this is not the only developmental possibility. The decision to extend higher education, to dabble in widely varied career options, or to delay career entry until the completion of childbearing may lengthen the time it takes to pass through the exploration stage, with consequent delays in completion of each of the subsequent stages. Similarly, adults who change careers in midlife will pass through the stages multiple times, with subsequent passages arising at ages well above the traditional norm. However, according to Super’s theory, unconventional timing does not automatically make the task of career development any more difficult, or carry any implication that the final outcome will be less successful.

Super’s second unconventional prediction is that the passage through a stage need not be permanent to define optimal development. Many other stage theories postulate that transitions are irreversible, and that only the atypical and deleterious circumstances of illness, injury, or decline can produce regression to earlier stages (Nagel, 1957). The potential instability even of normal and successful developmental change is implicit in Super’s concept of “recycling” (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988). According to the recycling notion, part of the normal developmental trajectory may include a return to stage issues that were initially laid to rest earlier in the life cycle, and this can facilitate personal development and coping with technological or social change (Hall, 1992). As Super explained (1990): “The concept of exploration as something completed in mid-adolescence has been shown to be invalid” (p.237). He viewed career decision-making as a lifelong process in which people continually strive to match their ever changing career goals to the realities of the world of work. In addition to these personal development needs, such social forces as economic downturns, layoffs, computerization, and the advent of new technologies, or new career paths within the organization can all stimulate regressive “recycling” backward through career stages. But, unlike the regressions of child and adolescent psychology, where problematic losses of developed capacity are seen to arise, the process of reverting to earlier stages in Super’s scheme through recycling is viewed as a means for enhancing maturity, coping power, and creative productivity. As Hall
(1992) explained: “Exploration [during mid-career] can lead to trial activity, new choices, identity changes, and increased adaptability and personal agency” (p. 247). Thus Super (1990, p. 237) proposed that so-called “unstable” (or “multiple-trial”) careers and midcareer crises were not only normal but psychologically advantageous in a climate of rapid social change.

Despite the theory’s intuitive appeal and obvious relevance to the career counseling of mature adults (Bocknek, 1976; Sharf, 1992), there has been surprisingly little empirical study of either of these two controversial postulates of Super’s theory. Super et al. (1988) gave a brief report of an unpublished survey of a group of teachers and health professionals who were attending a one-day conference. All were at a similar stage in the process of considering second careers, with no concrete plans to change careers. Their chronological age and career tenure therefore predicted lesser concern with exploration issues than with establishment or maintenance. The data largely supported these predictions. However, as the study included no comparison group of adults who were further advanced in the career-change process, its results failed to answer more basic questions such as whether exploration stage concerns are heightened during the process of midlife career change, or whether these decline again once stability is regained. A group of workers who were fully embarked on a second career would have been needed to test this predictions like these.

In a more complete test of these two theoretical postulates, Perosa and Perosa (1984) interviewed a sample of 134 men and women in the United States who were selected for the study because they had voluntarily decided to change careers. There were three subgroups, each at different stages of implementing a career transition. The “persisters” intended to change but had made no moves to do so, the “changing” group had quit their original jobs but had not yet embarked on new ones, and the “changed” had already entered their second occupations. Perosa and Perosa used the Career Development Inventory (CDI), developed by Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, and Myers (1981), to measure involvement in Super’s stages. The CDI rates career-stage concerns on a unidimensional continuum ranging from “not yet a concern to me” (scored 1), through “of great concern to me now” (scored 3), to “no longer a concern” (scored 5).

Little support for Super’s (1990) recycling postulates arose in this study. In fact, the only significant difference among the three career-change groups was a marginally higher tendency for the “changed” to be more concerned than the “changers” or the “persisters” with the exploratory issues of Super’s first stage. While the direction of this difference is opposite to that predicted by the recycling theory, this could be an artifact of the way the CDI was scored. The response measure confounded timing with intensity of concern. Thus respondents who had rated issues related to career exploration as “no longer a concern” would have earned higher scores than those who rated them “of great concern to me now.” Yet the lowest scores of all would have
been earned by those equally low in present concern to the first group, but who had happened to select the “not yet a concern” response option to depict timing. Thus, while one possibility was that the group who were in the throes of career change were not experiencing heightened concern with issues related to exploration that was predicted by Super’s theory, another possibility was the “changed” group’s higher scores reflected a decline in concerns with exploration now that their new careers were becoming established. A further limitation of Perosa and Perosa’s study was the absence from the sample of traditional workers of similar chronological ages with no intention of changing career. Such a group would have provided a necessary baseline comparison for the three actively changing groups.

Therefore, the major aim of the present study was to provide a clearer empirical test of Super’s (1990) postulate that recycling through concerns with early developmental stages is a normal and desirable part of the process of career change. We compared the developmental stage concerns of a sample of employed men and women who were roughly evenly distributed among the following four phases in the process of taking up second careers: (a) considering the possibility of career change, but no concrete plans, (b) definitely intending to change: a new field of work has been chosen, (c) actively implementing the move to a new career, and (d) a recent career change has been made: this group is fully embarked on the new career. In addition, a control group of workers of similar age, gender, education and occupational background who had no intention of changing their original careers was included for comparison. To avoid confounding voluntary career change with issues like unemployment, homemakers’ reentry into the labor force, or elderly workers’ planning for retirement, the sample was limited to adults under age 50 who were employed at the time. On the basis of Super’s theory of recycling, we predicted higher levels of concern with exploration issues among men and women who were actively engaged in the process of making a career change than among those who had either already completed a career change or expressed no intention of doing so.

An issue of secondary interest was the possible relation between job satisfaction and the transition to a second career. The results of a number of recent studies have suggested that workers who are forced to move into new careers by reason of retrenchment, unemployment, workplace computerization, and so on are apt to gain less satisfaction from their new jobs than from their old ones. For example, when Shamir and Arthur (1989) studied a group of professionals in Israel who moved to new careers after varying periods of unemployment, they found that duration of unemployment and size of the discrepancy between former and subsequent occupations were both negative predictors of satisfaction with the move. Similarly, Ackerman (1990) found that middle-aged women who desired and planned for new careers while still in their initial field of employment lost less job satisfaction through a career move than those who made unplanned changes after being forced out of the
original occupation. While suggesting that midlife career change could be both a cause and a consequence of diminished job satisfaction, data on involuntary career changes are complicated by the fact that such precursors to job change as retrenchment, demotion, or unemployment may themselves diminish job satisfaction quite apart from any effect of changing jobs per se. Indeed, the results of some anecdotal and open-ended interview studies of small samples of career changers have suggested that it is possible to maintain very high levels of satisfaction across the voluntary transition into a new career, even when income and occupational prestige decline with the move (Clopton, 1973; Kelleher, 1973; Stetson, 1973; Thomas, 1980).

By means of cross-sectional comparison among groups of adults, matched in other respects, who occupied each step in the progression from stability in the original career through the planning, implementation, and complete immersion in a new one, the second goal of the present study was therefore to explore the possibility that satisfaction with work varies systematically with progress through a career change. On the grounds that unhappiness with the former job could both motivate change and arise as a consequence of it, we predicted lower levels of job satisfaction during three intermediate steps in the process than for the nonchanging group or for those whose career changes were fully completed. In addition, on the grounds of Super’s (1990) suggestions about the normality of recycling and the argument that a career chosen in midcareer may permit a better match to mature developmental needs than a job chosen in adolescence (Hall, 1992), we likewise predicted greater satisfaction among adults who had recently completed a career change than among the stable control group. To explore these predictions regarding satisfaction in depth, we included measures of contentment with the overall pattern of one’s career development, as well as standard indices of satisfaction with the job itself.

In summary, the study’s three main hypotheses were:

1. Adults who are in the midst of the transition into a second career will experience greater concern with the issues bound up with Super’s initial stage of career exploration than adults of similar age, education, occupational background, and organizational tenure who (a) have no intention of ever changing careers, or (b) have completed a recent career transition and are fully embarked upon the second career.

2. The same pattern of contrasts as predicted by Hypothesis 1 should apply to concerns with Super’s establishment and maintenance stages, although possibly at an attenuated level. Until exploration issues are fully resolved in the second career, questions of becoming established or maintaining a position in it may assume secondary importance. However, given that a radical career change disrupts the normal developmental patterns of working life that non-changers may take for granted, we anticipated that adults who changed careers would experience somewhat more concern about establishment and mainte-
nance issues than would members of the nonchanging control group. (Given that Super’s final disengagement stage deals specifically with preparation for retirement, we advanced no hypotheses regarding this stage. We anticipated relatively low levels of concern with this stage because our sample was restricted to adults under 50.)

3. Adults who are currently in the process of making a career change will report less satisfaction with their present jobs and with their overall patterns of career development than adults who have no intention of changing careers; these latter, in turn, will report less satisfaction with their jobs and career progress than adults who have recently completed a transition into a second career and are reporting on their new occupations.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 226 Australian adults, 88 males and 138 females, with a mean age of 29.87 years ($SD = 8.40$). Of the total sample, 41% were married at the time or in a de facto relationship, 39% were single, and 20% were widowed, divorced, or separated. Their present levels of education ranged from incomplete high schooling (1%) through technical diplomas (pre-tertiary: 12%) to postgraduate university degrees (56%), with 87% having completed at least some university education. In order to be eligible to take part in the study, individuals had to: (a) be under 50 years of age, (b) be employed at the time, and (c) have made no more than one radical career change (defined as change to a “new type of occupation” rather than to move to a new firm, position, or rank in the same occupational field) in their working lives.

Of the sample as a whole, the largest group (36%) were educators who taught in kindergartens, primary schools, high schools, universities and workplace settings. The next largest group (23%) were employed in administrative/clerical jobs (e.g., secretary, accountant, personnel manager, bank teller). The fields of health (e.g., doctor, nurse, psychologist, counselor) supplied 11%, while a miscellaneous collection of individual occupations provided a further 10% of the sample (e.g., soldier, minister, journalist, waitress). Next came 6% who were in management (e.g., company directors, company managers, state sales manager), followed by the fields of law/welfare (e.g., solicitor, corrections officer, youth worker) and sales (e.g., sales consultant, sales assistant), each supplying 5%. The field of science and technology (e.g., computer programmer, scientist, engineer) provided the remaining 4% of the total sample.

Measures

Career change progress. The worker’s current position in the progression out of an old career into a new one, (Super’s notion of “recycling”), was measured using Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Myers, and Jordaan’s (1986) scale. Reproduced verbatim, this measure stated:
After working in a field for a while, many persons shift to another job for any of a variety of reasons: pay, satisfaction, opportunity for growth, shut-down, etc. When the shift is a change in field, not just working for another employer in the same field, it is commonly called a ‘‘career change’’. Following are five statements which represent various stages in career change. Choose the one statement that best describes your current status:

1. I am not considering making a career change.
2. I am considering whether to make a career change.
3. I plan to make a career change and am choosing a field to change to.
4. I have selected a new field and am trying to get started in it.
5. I have recently made a change and am settling down in the new field.

These five choices were treated categorically to form ‘‘nonchanger,’’ ‘‘contemplating,’’ ‘‘choosing field,’’ ‘‘implementing,’’ and ‘‘change-completed’’ groups.

**Career stage concerns.** A respondent’s present level of concern with issues typifying each of Super’s four developmental stages was measured by Super et al.’s (1988) Adult Career Concerns Inventory (ACCI). This measure assesses respondents’ levels of concern with Super’s four stages of career development and is an updated version of an earlier instrument known as the Career Development Inventory: Adult Form (CDI), which was developed by Super et al. (1981). Although the ACCI is new, the evidence of its factorial validity is encouraging, in line with earlier findings for the CDI. At least four separate factor-analytic studies assessing the CDI have revealed four factors corresponding closely to the four stages of Super’s theory (Cron & Slocum, 1986; Ornstein & Isabella, 1990; Phillips, 1982, Zelkowitz, 1974). In addition, Smart and Peterson (1994a) evaluated the more recent ACCI. Results supported its factorial validity by showing four factors congruent with Super’s four-stage model. For the present study, a short (48 item) form of the ACCI was used, containing 12 items representing each of the four stages. Examples included: ‘‘Clarifying my ideas about the type of work I would really enjoy’’ (exploration), ‘‘Achieving stability in my occupation’’ (establishment), ‘‘Keeping in tune with the people I work with’’ (maintenance), and ‘‘Developing more hobbies to supplement work interests’’ (disengagement). For each item, respondents marked a 5-point scale to indicate the strength of their present concern with each issue. These ratings were scored from 1 = ‘‘no concern’’ to 5 = ‘‘great concern.’’ Each participant’s ratings of the 12 items representing a given stage were summed and averaged to yield scores for each stage that could range from a low of 1 to a high of 5. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the present sample ranged from .83 to .96, thus comparing favorably with previous research using the CDI (Ornstein & Isabella, 1990) and indicating adequate internal consistency of the four distinct stages.

**Job satisfaction.** The Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) measures five facets of job satisfaction: (a) enjoyment of the work itself, (b) satisfaction with supervision, (c) satisfaction with pay, (d) satisfaction with
chances for promotion, and (e) satisfaction with co-workers. The items consist of adjectives or adjectival phrases such as “routine,” “challenging,” “gives a sense of accomplishment,” and “on your feet.” Response alternatives are “yes,” “no,” or “uncertain,” scored 3, 0, and 1, respectively. Scores are summed and averaged to produce a mean for each facet. The global satisfaction score (used in the present study), the mean of these five facet means, ranges from 1 to 3. Price and Mueller (1981) reviewed the reliability and validity of the JDI and reported that there is strong evidence for both. For the present sample, Cronbach’s alpha reliability for global job satisfaction was .92, consistent with past alpha coefficients reported in Cook, Hepworth, Wall, and Warr (1981) ranging as high as .93. This sound evidence of internal consistency is also in accord with findings by Morrow and McElroy (1987).

Career satisfaction. Respondents’ levels of satisfaction with the overall shape of their careers in terms of career progress and career development were assessed using a four-item measure adapted from Romzek’s (1989) career satisfaction scale. One of the items assessing progress asked: “Overall, how satisfied are you with your career progress?” and one assessing career development asked: “How satisfied are you with the amount of opportunity available in your present job for career or professional development?” Responses were recorded on 5-point scales from “very dissatisfied (scored 1)” to “very satisfied” (scored 5). Owing to (a) the conceptual overlap between concepts of progress and development and (b) the small number of items used to assess each, we combined scores on the two pairs of items and divided the total by 4 to obtain a mean career satisfaction score that could range from 1 to 5. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the present sample was .85, indicating adequate internal consistency.

Procedure
Self-administered questionnaires containing all measures used in the study and an introductory letter explaining the nature and purpose of the study were completed privately and anonymously by each participant and returned to the researchers in a prepaid envelope. The sample, recruited from multiple sources, was occupationally diverse. In order to obtain participants who were likely to be considering or implementing a career change, part-time university students who were taking evening classes while working were canvassed, and consequently accounted for 63% of the final sample. The remainder were volunteers who were at that time employed in schools, banks, and sales. These adults were recruited through personal contacts and notices distributed in their organizations inviting them to complete an anonymous questionnaire on “career planning.”

RESULTS
A series of preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether the five career-change groups were comparable on demographic variables that
might be correlated with the dependent measures. Degrees of freedom for some analyses vary slightly owing to missing values on a few items.

A one-way ANOVA comparing the mean ages of respondents at each of the five stages of career-change planning revealed no significant differences, $F(4, 220) = 2.40, p > .05$. There were likewise no significant differences among the groups in gender composition, $\chi^2 (4, N = 226) = .80, p > .50$. Members of each of the five groups had averaged a similar number of years in their present career positions (including the effects of promotions), $F(4, 220) = 1.16, p > .25$. They had also each spent a similar mean number of years in the employ of their present organization, $F(4, 220) = 1.42, p > .20$. Their levels of precareer and postcareer education were equivalent, with no statistically significant differences emerging among the five career-change groups either in the level of education achieved prior to career entry, $F(4, 220) = 2.33, p > .05$, or in their present levels of education (including the results of study completed during working life), $F(4, 220) = 2.12, p > .05$. Likewise, they averaged a similar number of hours of work per week in their present job, $F(4, 220) = .65, p > .60$.

In terms of family life, about half the members of each career-change group were involved in a couple relationship at the time (married or de facto), with the remainder being single, separated, divorced, or widowed. There were no significant differences among the groups in the proportion who were involved at the time versus uninvolved in couple relationships, $\chi^2 (4, N = 226) = 3.31, p > .50$. However, a statistically significant difference did emerge in the number of dependent children being cared for by members of the five career-change groups, $F(4, 220) = 6.30, p < .001$. A post hoc Newman–Keuls test at the $p < .05$ level revealed that the nonchanging group and the group who had already completed a change did not differ significantly from one another, but had fewer dependent children than members of the three groups who were actively involved in making a career change, who likewise did not differ significantly from one another. However, the fact that mean numbers of dependent offspring for the former two groups averaged 2.60 and 3.39, respectively, indicated that active involvement in parenthood was the typical condition for members of all five career-change planning groups. Thus difference in absolute numbers of dependent offspring was not likely to limit the possibility of testing our hypotheses through group comparison.

In sum, the five groups appeared to be highly comparable in demographic and vocational factors apart from the planning or the implementation of a career change itself. This enabled comparison across the groups in terms of possible predictors and consequences of the decision to change careers.

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the entire sample on the dependent measures and the correlations among these variables. The significant positive correlations among each of the four ACCI stage scores suggest that concern with any one of Super’s stages of career development was a predictor of heightened concern with each of the others, a finding
TABLE 1
Intercorrelations among the Dependent Variables and Means and Standard Deviations for the Total Sample

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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.77</td>
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<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>.93</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.49</td>
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Dependent variable
1. Exploration —
2. Establishment .75
3. Maintenance .64
4. Disengagement .50
5. Global job satisfaction −.23
6. Career satisfaction −.38

*Coefficients of .12 or higher are significant at p < .05; and of .16 or higher, at p < .01, two tailed.
consistent with our second hypothesis. The four stage scores correlated negatively with the two satisfaction variables which correlated positively. These results imply that participants who were relatively unhappy with their progress in career development were relatively unhappy with their present jobs and more intensely preoccupied with issues bound up with each of Super’s developmental stages.

The first hypothesis predicted greater concern with exploration-stage issues among respondents in the three intermediate stages of actively changing careers than among those who had fully completed a change to a new career or those in the nonchanging control group. To test this, a multivariate analysis of variance was performed with the five career-change stages as the independent variables and ACCI scores as the dependent variables. There were no univariate or multivariate outliers at $\alpha = .001$. Results of evaluations of assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, linearity, and multicollinearity were likewise satisfactory.

Wilk’s criterion indicated the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by stage of progress through a career change, $F(16, 663) = 6.94, p < .001$, so univariate ANOVAs were performed to examine each of Super’s four career concern dimensions separately. The means, standard deviations, and number of subjects on which these ANOVAs were based appear in Table 2. Concern with exploration-stage issues varied significantly as a function of career-change progress, $F(4, 222) = 18.76, p < .001$. A post hoc Newman–Keuls test at $p < .05$ indicated that the three groups who were actively involved in the process of career change (contemplating, choosing, and implementing) earned significantly higher means than the nonchangers. In addition, the choosers’ and implementers’ means were significantly higher than those of both the contemplating and the change-completed groups. Possibly in part as a function of the small number of participants in the latter group ($n = 24$), no statistically significant differences in exploration concern emerged between respondents who had fully completed a career change and those who were either at the initial stage of contemplating one or in the control group with no intention of making any change. Thus Hypothesis 1 was generally supported by these results.

The second hypothesis predicted heightened concern with establishment issues among the career changers than in the nonchanging control group. A univariate ANOVA for concern with establishment issues yielded a significant difference as a function of career-change progress, $F(4, 222) = 3.50, p < .01$. As shown in Table 2, the strongest level of concern was expressed by the “implementing” group, and a post hoc Newman–Keuls test at $p < .05$ indicated that this group’s mean score was significantly higher than all the others, with no statistically significant contrasts among any of the remaining pairs of means. For maintenance concerns, the univariate ANOVA revealed a significant effect of career change, $F(4, 222) = 2.62, p < .05$. None of the pairwise contrasts among means reached significance on a post
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Nonchanger ((n = 81))</th>
<th>Contemplating ((n = 46))</th>
<th>Choosing a field ((n = 32))</th>
<th>Implementing ((n = 43))</th>
<th>Change completed ((n = 24))</th>
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<td>Exploration concern</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>(.83)</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>(.83)</td>
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<td>1.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>(.44)</td>
<td>(.48)</td>
<td>(.59)</td>
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<td>Career Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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hoc Newman–Keuls test at \( p < .05 \). This absence of variation as a function of career change and the relatively weak concern with maintenance issues displayed by the present sample as a whole may both be attributable to the relative youth of the present group of respondents. All participants in the present study were under age 50, whereas the normative age of onset for Super’s maintenance stage in a traditional single-career life cycle is between 45 and 50 years (Super, 1957). In general, the results provided modest support for Hypothesis 2, although the most notable finding was the relative absence of differences due to career change in establishment and maintenance concerns, as distinct from evident contrasts in preoccupation with exploration stage at different steps in the transition to a new career.

In order to explore the possibility of differences in enjoyment of the present job as a function of progress through a career change, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on the global job satisfaction scores of the five groups. The means and standard deviations appear in Table 2. A statistically significant difference emerged, \( F(4, 221) = 14.85, p < .001 \). A post hoc Newman–Keuls test at the \( p < .05 \) level revealed that participants who had fully completed a career change were significantly more satisfied with their present jobs than each of the remaining groups. The nonchanging control group, in turn, scored significantly higher in global job satisfaction than each of the three groups who were still actively involved in the career change process. Finally, the implementing and contemplating groups, while not significantly different from one another, were each more satisfied than the group choosing a field to move into.

Career satisfaction scores for the five career-change groups likewise appear in Table 2. The univariate ANOVA was again statistically significant \( F(4, 22) = 20.61, p < .001 \). A post hoc Newman–Keuls test at the \( p < .05 \) level indicated that participants who had fully completed a career change did not differ significantly from the nonchanging control group. Both of these groups were significantly higher in career satisfaction than members of each of the three groups who were still actively involved in the process of career change, whereas these latter three groups did not differ significantly among one another. Thus Hypothesis 3 was fully supported by the results for global job satisfaction but only partially supported for career satisfaction. As predicted, the group of respondents who had recently completed a career change were more satisfied with their career development progress than those still in the throes of career change. There was no corresponding evidence that this group had greater career satisfaction than the matched control group of workers who had no intention of changing out of their original careers.

**DISCUSSION**

Super’s concept of career “recycling” predicts that individuals who elect to change their main field of career activity part way into occupational life will pass through the full set of career stages for a second time, successively
expressing renewed concern with each of the developmental tasks that, in a single-career life cycle, arise only once and take roughly a decade to work through. Our overall pattern of results supported this theory in a number of ways. First, the notion of changes in patterns of concern with career stages as a consequence of career change was supported by the finding that preoccupation with Super’s initial stage of career exploration was stronger in adults who were in the throes of making a transition to a new career than among a matched group of workers of similar background who had no intention of changing careers. Second, although the number of participants who had fully completed a voluntary change to a new career in this sample was small, their responses were consistent with Super’s recycling postulate to the extent that they expressed significantly less concern with the exploration stage (which they had presumably already passed through for the second time) than the ‘‘implementing’’ and ‘‘choosing a field’’ groups who were still in the throes of the transition into a new career.

Concerns with Super’s later stages of establishment and maintenance, as predicted, varied less than exploration concern with progress through the process of embarking upon a second career. However, the significant differences that did arise between career-change groups were generally consistent with the hypothesis of heightened concern with the postexploration stages of career development as a consequence of disrupting the rhythm of a traditional career life cycle by deciding to switch to a new career.

While these results overall are closely in accord with Super’s recycling theory, a number of limitations of the present study do warrant consideration. First, the present sample was cross-sectional. Thus, even though the results of our preliminary analyses suggested that the four changing groups did not differ from one another or from the nonchanging control group in age or any other variable that seemed likely to affect concerns with Super’s stages, longitudinal data are needed to confirm that the same contrasts would also arise over time as individuals progress through the process of implementing a career transition. Second, the high average level of education and uniform employment status of the present sample raises questions about the generalizability of these results to other samples of adults who switch to new careers. We deliberately excluded unemployed adults or homemakers who were out of the work force so we could focus on voluntary career change by working men and women. Therefore, it is not clear that the present results would generalize to these groups who are of strong interest in terms of their likely practical needs for effective career counseling. Third, it would be important to test the replicability of the present findings to adults in other cultures who elect to change careers. In previous career development research, data from Australian samples have tended to reveal patterns of career orientation that are quite similar to those observed in the United States (e.g., Hesketh, Elmslie & Kaldor, 1990; Smart & Peterson, 1994b). However, the relative ease with which employed adults can effect transitions into second careers is likely
to vary not only with culture but also from occupation to occupation within the same cultural environment. The fact that most members of the present sample were highly educated, aware of their career options, and relatively occupationally advantaged highlights the needs for further study of culturally diverse and less advantaged groups.

The finding that participants who had fully completed the change into a second career were just as satisfied with their overall process of career development as stable single careerists is in keeping with Super’s (1990) view that recycling into a new career is a normal developmental outcome with no adverse long-term implications for personal happiness or vocational maturity. Although satisfaction with the present job and with career progress were both lower among workers in the throes of career change than in the two stable groups, it appears that these losses may be temporary. Indeed, the fact that the established second career group scored as even more satisfied with their present jobs than the single careerists is in line with Hall’s (1992) notion that the undertaking of a new career in midlife can serve as an adaptive response to the new needs and goals that can arise with adult psychological development after initial career choices are made. On the other hand, the lower satisfaction scores of the actively changing respondents than of the two stable groups suggest that developmental transitions are by their very nature stressful (Levinson, 1986), even when voluntarily chosen and beneficial in the long term. Applied to counseling, this result is consistent with the view that clients who find themselves dissatisfied with their careers in midlife should be encouraged to engage in systematic and extensive career exploration (Super, 1990). They should not be dissuaded from opting for a new career either by the belief that midlife uncertainty and career instability are ‘‘abnormal’’ (Bocknek, 1976), or by the stresses and temporary losses of satisfaction that can diminish confidence during the process of contemplating and implementing a move to a new career. Of course, such conclusions must remain tentative in the absence of longitudinal data exploring rises and falls in career satisfaction in the same individuals as they move into new careers. In conjunction with the longitudinal study of stable, single careerists, such data could likewise help to clarify whether job dissatisfaction and/or career dissatisfaction arise primarily as an impetus to the decision to change careers or as a consequence of the stress and uncertainty embodied in a career transition itself. Such additional research is also strongly recommended as a database in which to anchor recommendations for the career counseling of mature adults who may wonder whether the four or so decades of an average working life is too short a time span to permit effectively a midlife transition into a radically new occupation (Sharf, 1992).

REFERENCES


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