Relevant Career Practitioner Sector

Schools	Tertiary Education	Private Practice	Employment Services and Recruitment	Other
✓		✓		Alternative school education providers

The authors investigated the influences on the career development of 18 gifted adolescent girls in Years 10-12, aged 3-19 years attending selective high schools in South Australia. The literature review indicated that the achievement of eminence or domain excellence is a long-term goal for gifted individuals, yet there are fewer women than men who achieve eminence or domain excellence in almost every field of endeavour, including traditionally female fields of endeavour. This prompted Napier et al. (2024) to conduct a qualitative cross-sectional study to gain an understanding of the career aspirations, values and influences on career goals of the girls who participated in the study.

The research was grounded in Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise and self-creation (1981; 2002) and Savickas' (2002) Career Construction Theory. These theories were considered appropriate because they are concerned with career development over time, much like the development of giftedness and talent. In addition, both Gottfredson and Savickas focus on the individual in their social and environmental contexts. Similarly, the development of an giftedness or talent are influenced by the person and their context.

A cross-sectional qualitative research design was used and the researchers adopted an interpretivist stance. A semi-structured interview derived the theory of circumscription and compromise and Career Construction Theory was used to gather data. Each study participant was interviewed twice for 40-60 minutes, approximately 12 months apart.

The research questions were:

1. "How do gifted adolescent girls in South Australian selective secondary school programs describe the factors influencing their career-related values, decision-making processes, and goals?
2. How do gifted adolescent girls describe any enablers, tensions, or inhibitors to the development of their career-related values, decision-making processes, and goals?" (p. 51)

Findings:

1. Study participants described six core career-related values that influenced their career goals and decisions, including:
   - Future career success
   - Leadership
   - Enjoyment
   - Alignment with interests and strengths
   - Well-being and work/life balance
   - Altruism and a commitment to using strengths and interests to take the lead in making positive difference to the lives of others.

Napier et al. interpreted these core values as elements underpinning the participants' individual life themes and narrative identity. The value of altruism also reflects a fifth developmental stage identified in Gottfredson (1981, p. 554) – an integrated world view of humanity, obtained through reflective consideration, usually only exhibited by small proportion of adolescents. Napier et al suggest a common overarching narrative that this population of gifted adolescent girls may have a sense of life calling.

2. Participants referred to processes of broadening and narrowing their career options in order to crystallise their primary career aspirations. Exposure to role models and mentorship opportunities related to an area of career interest served to widen the range of career options participants could consider. Many participants expressed a desire for more school experiences to expand their career options. When it came to narrowing their career options, participants used their career interests and their strengths as a basis for narrowing their options.

3. The participant's evolving identity influenced their career aspirations over time. Identity elements discussed by participants included:
   - Beliefs
   - Strengths
   - Career-related potential
   - Family background
   - Challenges.

4. Some participants viewed personal traits as barriers to their career development, such as introversion, multipotentiality or perfectionist tendencies. However, multipotentiality was only seen as a barrier by four of the 18 participants and mostly perfectionism was regarded as an asset to career development. Some participants viewed mental health issues as a barrier to their career development. High standards for university entrance was regarded by some as an external barrier.

5. Many participants regarded their family as an enabling influence on their career development, with both mothers and fathers regarded as having an influence on participants' career development. Participants perceived their mothers as having a stronger enabling influence than their fathers, although they perceived their fathers to provide practical support. Older siblings and extended family were also considered to be an enabling influence in relation to career development, as well as mentoring younger siblings.

6. Enrolment into a selective academic program was perceived as both an enabler and inhibitor of career development. Participants indicated that selection into a program for gifted students may potentially widen their career options. On the other hand, participants reported perceived pressure from parents and teachers and high internal expectations for future career achievement. The special relationships that the participants formed with key teachers was seen to be an enabler.

   Participants reported that school work experience programs helped them narrow down their career options, but they were sometimes disappointed about the lack of work placement opportunities in career fields appropriate to their career interests and aspirations. Many perceived that selective academic programs should pay more attention to career guidance.

7. None of the participants reported exposure to a specialised career guidance program for gifted students. However, they valued the career support provided to all students.

8. Opportunities outside of school, such as self-initiated work experience placements and self-initiated volunteering roles enabled participants to reality test options related to their interests and strengths.

9. Participants raised concerns about the impact of technology on their career trajectory, gender roles and work/life balance.

Napier et al. stress that the transferability of these findings is limited to adolescent gifted girls in similar selective gifted education programs in urban settings. Nevertheless, this study has several implications for career practitioners who support girls in selective academic programs. These include:

1. Individualised and personalised career development support that focuses on the specific career development concerns for gifted adolescent girls, provides opportunities for students to have career conversations with key teachers, provides experiences and independent projects tailored to the interests and career preferences of the students.

2. Student access a wide range of career-related contexts and relationships over time, including:
   - Work placements with 'high impact' organisations that have a focus on making a positive difference in the lives of others.
   - Opportunities to work with female role models.
   - Mentorship opportunities tailored to benefit gifted girls.

3. Exposure to broad-ranging career and study possibilities as well as discussion of gender-related issues that may need to be navigated. Additional support should be provided for those who experience their mutipotentiality as a barrier.

4. Exposure to opportunities that nurture leadership aspirations in school and/or community contexts.

5. Examination of the career education curriculum to ensure that the specific career development needs of gifted girls are addressed.

6. Career education content to support gifted girls to manage psychological and social aspects of their career development, such as how to manage high expectations for their career achievements and balancing multiple life roles.