EXPLORING CAREER DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES OF

MEXICAN AMERICAN RE-ENTRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOMEN

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,
Manuel and Adela Dominguez and
to my brothers and sisters, Monica, Manuel, Patsy, Becky, and P.J.

This is also dedicated to all the women who shared their stories for this study.

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by

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The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to increase understanding of the career perspectives of 12 Mexican American, re-entry women who were attending a community college. The questions guiding this investigation were: (a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences, (b) What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes, and (c) To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets of self-efficacy expectations substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? The decision-making themes that emerged from this study were Parental Messages, Spontaneous Career Paths, Helping Others, Volunteerism, Religious Faith, Resource Awareness and Acquisition, and Familial Responsibility. Minor themes also emerged. Themes uncovering factors about career decision-making processes included Spouse or Significant Other Priorities, Critical life-changing Occurrences, and Participants' Children. The research findings corroborated Bandura's four major tenets of self-efficacy expectations.

Results of this study suggested that a traditional way of assisting college students may not be beneficial to the nontraditional college student. Implications for counselors and counseling programs are shared to enhance the career counseling process of nontraditional student populations.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Counseling research continues to address the need for counselors to develop career counseling approaches in tandem with 21st century concerns. The career decision-making process is often identified as taking a career test, exploring careers, selecting a career, and taking action to enter that career. This process is commonly referred to as the Parson's trait-and-factor approach (Brown & Brooks, 1990). According to current research, career decisions may be influenced by internal (e.g., low or high career self-efficacy) and external (e.g., gender stereotyping) variables, societal contexts, and other factors (Mihal, Sorce, & Compte, 1984).

The changing gender and ethnic demographics of the U. S. labor force, for example, make it imperative for counselors to be more mindful of diversity issues in the career decision-making process. Since the inception of career choice and decision making theories, researchers have historically devoted more attention to the investigation of Caucasian, male college students because they were the majority population attending colleges and universities. As a result, there are a limited number of studies that explore the career decision-making processes of women who are attending college. Therefore, a gap exists in the knowledge base regarding career-related women's issues. This is problematic because women now make up more than half of the students attending college (Lewin, 2006). Moreover, prior research consistently demonstrates that cultural and gender factors significantly impact the shaping of individual career decision-making processes (Caldera, Robitschek, Frame, & Pannell, 2003; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006; Osborn, Howard, & Leierer, 2007; Young, Marshall, & Valach, 2007).

In addition to the growing number of women attending college, the demographic shift in the United States has produced a more ethnically diverse college population (Green, 2006). This

indicates the need for an additional layer of understanding to address career decision-making factors of ethnic minority college women. According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2000), the largest minority population in the U. S. is Hispanic (12.5%). Within this demographic, Mexican Americans make up the largest ethnic group (58.6%). Yet, the Hispanic population has the lowest high school completion rate (57%) in comparison to that of White (88.4%), Black (78.5%), and Asian (85.7%) populations. College graduation rates are similarly low for Hispanic populations (10.6%) in comparison to that of White (28.1%), Black (16.5%), and Asian (43.9%) populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These trends clearly demonstrate a need to develop effective educational and career related interventions for Hispanic and other ethnic minority populations.

For many underrepresented populations, the first step in making a career decision begins by enrolling in a community college (Green, 2006). For students who have not traditionally attended college, the lack of guidance and resources can make the transition into college— balancing academic, family, and social demands—overwhelming (Green, 2006). The term *nontraditional student* is often used in the literature to define historically underserved higher education populations. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) describe community colleges as consisting of "disproportionate numbers of non-residents, part-time, older, non-white, and working class students" (p. 156). Kim (2002) broadens the definition of a nontraditional student to describe students who are non-male, 25 years of age and older, at-risk of dropping out of college, first in their family to attend college, and are from a lower-socioeconomic status background. Given the nontraditional student population within the community college setting, a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by this group of students is essential.

Career practitioners have long argued that nontraditional college students may require

different types of services than traditional college students (Luzzo, 1993). For instance, literature demonstrates that nontraditional college student populations experience childcare problems (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005), financial constraints (Lester, 2006), a lack of social support (Caldera et al., 2003; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004), and family opposition (Constantine & Flores, 2006). Additional investigation of broadly diverse student populations may help illuminate issues and practices relevant to nontraditional community college student populations.

Green (2006) states that, historically, ethnic minority student populations have not experienced college at the same success rate as Caucasian students and students from higher socio-economic status backgrounds. For instance, these students may not have attended college immediately following high school, were more likely to begin their higher education at a junior college, and were more likely to attend college part-time or intermittently (Green, 2006). In addition, Jhirad (2006) suggests that the community college system is geared toward students who never thought about going to college. These students may be surprised to learn that attending college may not be as intimidating as originally perceived given the availability of numerous student support services.

Furthermore, the majority of existing career-related research examines Caucasian male college populations between the ages of 18 and 24. Concomitantly, the largest age group in the United States is 25 to 54 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). However, this age group has not been adequately represented in career-related research involving career interventions, career instrument development, and career decision making (Caldera et al, 2003; Constantine & Flores, 2006; Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999; Maples & Luzzo, 2005; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000; Wolfe & Betz, 2004). In a higher-educational system, the term *re-entry* describes the latter age group of individuals who are re-entering college after a significant time lapse since they last attended

school (Tittle & Denker, 1977). As a result of this gap in career literature, this investigation will focus on examining students attending community college who are 25 years of age and older.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigates the career decision-making processes and perspectives of Mexican American, re-entry, community college women. The problem is one that is pressing given research that indicates that among Hispanic ethnic groups, Mexican American citizens have earned the least postsecondary education when compared to other minority groups (U. S. Census, 2000; Wycoff, 1996). This research is in response to the limited studies concerning ethnic minority women returning to college, low educational attainment and college graduation rates of Mexican American women, and the lack of information about the career decision-making processes of ethnic minority college women 25 years of age and older.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation is to increase understanding of the career experiences and perspectives of Mexican American, re-entry women who are attending a community college. Findings from this current research may aid in the following areas: college recruitment and retention efforts of ethnic minority college women, potential undeveloped factors that reflect gender and culturally sensitive aspects of career decision-making processes, and development of effective career interventions for women of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Theoretical Perspectives

Although several theorists (e.g., Holland, 1985; Krumboltz, 1979; Super, 1981) have expanded Parson's trait-and-factor approach, fewer theorists have expanded career counseling practices that support ethnic minority female college populations. Much of the current career counseling research about women has emerged from researchers who draw from Bandura's

social cognitive learning theory (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Lent & Brown, 1996; Sandler, 2000; Sullivan and Mahalik, 2000; Taylor & Betz, 1983). This theory incorporates *self-efficacy* as an integral factor in making decisions and setting goals (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Self-efficacy is described as the belief one has about accomplishing a particular task that leads to a specific goal (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) suggests that self-efficacy expectations may be reached or changed through four major tenets**:** (a) performance accomplishments—completing tasks successfully; (b) vicarious learning—learning through observation; (c) emotional arousal—managing anxiety and stress; and (d) verbal persuasion—listening to or viewing encouraging videos. In turn, an individual's self-efficacy beliefs have been known to influence the magnitude of persistence, either positively or negatively, when individuals face challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1986). Many career interventions have incorporated these four principle tenets (Foltz & Luzzo, 1998; Paulsen & Betz, 2004; Sandler, 2000; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000); however, few studies identify techniques that are helpful for women (Leech & Kees, 2005), and even fewer studies have been conducted with ethnic minority women.

Within the past two decades, career researchers who focused on studying nontraditional student populations, have suggested using approaches that emphasize social cognitive components (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), ecological aspects (Cook et al., 2002; McDonald, 2002), or relational perspectives (Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001) to understand ethnically diverse individuals. Researchers have investigated additional career decision-making barriers, such as career self-efficacy, career choice commitment, and dysfunctional career thoughts (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Osborn et al., 2007; Wolfe & Betz, 2004). Nonetheless, McDonald (2002) suggests that there lacks proven career counseling interventions strategies for nontraditional women students. Cook et al. (2002) reiterate that any intervention created to

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expand career strategies for ethnic minority women must integrate the numerous factors that shape their career decisions.

While some investigators have examined the career decision-making processes of nontraditional college populations, few researchers have addressed the more specific career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry women attending college (Arbona, 1990; Caldera et al., 2003; Gomez et al., 2001; Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005). However, some researchers have examined career considerations of Hispanic women (Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg, & Ponterotto, 2007), parental influences on career development issues of ethnic minority women students (Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999), and career indecision of ethnic minority college women groups (Lopez & Ann-Yi, 2006). While these researchers have provided insight into the career decision-making factors for ethnic minority student populations, more studies are needed to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the career decision-making processes of Mexican American re-entry women attending community college**.**

This research will focus on capturing the essence of how this population describes their career decision-making experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the researcher will explore how Bandura's (1986) four major tenets substantiate this population's belief in themselves to undertake particular career-related tasks. When conducting a qualitative investigation, it is good practice for the researcher to explore and acknowledge assumptions about his or her personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher's career perspectives, experiences, and limitations are provided below to further contextualize the foundation of this study.

Self-Statement

I grew up in a small town in west Texas. My father, from Spanish and German

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descent, and mother, from Mexican and Native American ancestry, attained limited education (6th grade and 9th grade, respectively). We are a family of six children. I am considered the middle-child. My upbringing, limited exposure to diverse perspectives, and coincidental experiences helped shape my early career decision-making choices. In retrospect, my choices seemed limited, but my curiosity and relentless desire to know and experience more in life would be the beginning of my tenacity to pursue and achieve unforeseeable accomplishments. Early in my adolescent years, I decided that upon graduating high school I would leave my hometown to do "something" with my life. Yet, I had no inclination of what that something would be.

Because of the lack of career exposure and guidance, my perceived career choices were limited to (a) remaining in my current occupation as a Pharmacist Assistant; (b) attending college; (c) getting married and having children; or (d) joining the military. As a Pharmacist Assistant, I was bored doing the repetitive tasks and saw no room for advancement. Regarding a college career, I came from a low-income family and was uninformed of financial aid assistance. Also, at the time, I was not ready to explore starting a family. After eliminating my perceived career options, I decided to join the United States Air Force (USAF) despite my family's opposition to women entering the military. Despite their resistance, the decision to join the military provided me with a sense of autonomy and financial security, even with the risks involved in joining the military.

As a service member, I became an Air Traffic Controller stationed in California. The majority of the military members stationed there were Caucasian. Initially, I had no idea of the duties of an Air Traffic Controller. I also had no idea that this particular profession was male-dominated. I was the only Hispanic female stationed in the control tower at that time and believed I always had to prove myself to the men, which made me work harder. As I became

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more experienced, I gained not only an understanding of the profession but invaluable life lessons and skills. During my military career, I had the opportunity to teach, train, and advise new military members. Throughout this experience, I discovered that I enjoyed helping people learn about the world of work and about themselves.

However, after several years of working in this career, I also learned that I did not enjoy rotating, shift work. I decided then to pursue higher education so that I could enter a career field that could provide me a more traditional work-schedule. I remember asking my military supervisor for guidance about how to begin my college journey, since I had no idea about how to get started. No one in my family had ever attended college. Despite my hesitation, I opted to explore community college programs that were offered on the military base because of their close proximity. The base guidance counselor suggested I take a career inventory to select a career field. The interest inventory results indicated that I had a high preference for business. As a result, I selected a major in business administration. After 3 years of taking classes part-time and working full-time, I achieved my A.S. degree in Business Administration. However, I was still undecided about the type of civilian career I would enter after the end of my enlistment.

Due to my career indecision, I decided to explore bachelor degree programs available on the base. I selected my major based upon coursework descriptions that appeared to be fun. I chose to pursue a B.S. degree in Workforce Education and Development. I successfully completed my bachelor's degree with a GPA of 4.0. The coursework provided me new ways of looking at the world of work. It also provided me an opportunity to explore other careers after taking a series of career assessments. This opportunity and my lack of initial career guidance, led me to explore a master's degree in counseling. I reasoned that since I would work for at least 40 more years, attending college for another two years in an enjoyable major would be worth the

investment. I decided to pursue my M.A. degree in Counseling, with an emphasis in career counseling, while successfully completing my enlistment with the USAF.

The transition from military to civilian life was exciting and scary at the same time. I was 18 when I joined the military and was in my late 20s when I completed my enlistment. I had no resume or formal interview experience, and I had never searched for medical health plans. The military seemed to take care of everything. Luckily, the USAF offered a two-week program involving transition assistance, such as job preparation and planning. I was thankful for my military experience, special transitional programs, and for achieving higher education. These experiences guided my future journey.

My professional history includes over 15 years of experience providing career and personal counseling to adolescent and adult populations in schools, colleges, corporations, and non-profit agencies. My experiences in the military, higher education, and various employment settings have enhanced my strategies in counseling and teaching. Through the years, I learned creative ways of teaching and preparing people for a more positive college and life experience. I value individual differences and focus on developing people's awareness through self-exploration, career exploration, workforce preparation and research, and investigation of career myths and dysfunctional ways of thinking. A philosophy instilled in me by my parents is that anyone can achieve what they set their mind to do as long as they apply themselves.

In reflection, my background, curiosity, perseverance, and determination influenced my career decisions; however, I would have benefited even more if I had knowledge of career counselors, career information, career exposure, and resources. Because I lacked this information, I fell into a phenomenon in career counseling known as *career happenstance* (i.e., by chance). This means I stumbled upon a job that led me to an ideal career without planning it

(Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). My career-happenstance experience led me in a direction that was unplanned. Conversely, what made a difference in my career decision-making process were my attitude, openness, and continual exploration, along with some personal and professional risk-taking. Most importantly, my faith granted me the courage to take risks even when I had doubts about the journey. I am a single, 41 year old Mexican American woman with no children who recently re-entered graduate school 10 years after earning my master's degree. I am aware that these personal pieces of me could influence my analysis without due vigilance to accurately represent participants involved in this research. These are personal and life experiences that have cultivated my interests in exploring the career decision-making experiences of re-entry Mexican American women community college students.

Research Questions

This investigation will examine the perspectives of Mexican American re-entry women attending community college and their career decision-making experiences. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following questions:

a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences?

b) What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes?

c) To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy beliefs substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women?

Methodology

This study will qualitatively examine the perspectives and experiences of 12 Mexican American re-entry college women in their career decision-making processes. Qualitative methods are well known for providing a natural way of communicating the topic being investigated. A phenomenological approach will be employed to examine perceived factors that influence participants' career decision-making processes and to observe how words are used to gain meaning (Giorgi, 1970). Edmund Husserl, well known for his contributions in phenomenology, declares that each individual experiences phenomena in his or her own way (Creswell, 1998); therefore, the aim of this study is to "describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 5). To that end, the data collection will involve open-ended, in-depth interviews with the participants.

Definition of Terms

Latina – a woman of Latin-American descent including individuals of Mexican, Central American, South American, Cuban, and Puerto Rican origin, regardless of immigration or generation status (Villalpando, 2003).

Mexican American – a citizen or resident living in the U. S. of Mexican birth or descent (Villalpando, 2003).

Hispanic – persons who indicate that their origin of birth was Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central or South America (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Students of color – students of African-American, Mexican-American/Latino/Chicano, Asian American, or American Indian descent (Villalpando, 2003).

Re-entry – individuals who are re-entering school after time has passed since the individual last

attended an academic institution (Tittle & Denker, 1977).

Nontraditional – students who are financially independent of parental support, students of color, part-time students, high school dropouts, single parents, full-time workers, low-income students, or students who are first in their family to attend college (Kim, 2002). Students may fall into one or more of the preceding categories.

Career decision making – a variety of thoughts and behaviors that occur when individuals experience conflict within themselves (i.e., unappreciated at work) or externally (i.e., need to make more money to pay bills) where action is needed to reduce the inconsistency between current and desired role outcomes. Individuals may be functioning in several stages simultaneously and at differing intervals across the life span (Mihal et al., 1984).

Summary

In this chapter, an introduction of the research topic, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, the researcher's self-statement, career decision-making theoretical perspectives, and the definition of terms were provided. In Chapter Two, historical perspectives of career decision making followed by a review of career literature as related to women and ethnically diverse college students will be covered. Chapter Three will focus on methodology, including an overview of the phenomenological design, introduction of the research setting and participants, and a description of the procedures. The results of the study will be presented in Chapter Four. The final Chapter will discuss implications of the study, its contribution to the counseling profession, and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Career literature continues to support the need for counselors to design and implement enhanced career development practices (Gibson & Mitchell, 2006). Counselors are encouraged to develop career interventions that are directed toward helping people identify, clarify, and gain meaning in their everyday career and life activities (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). However, career researchers and practitioners alike assert that traditional career development theories are limited in preparing women for a dramatically changing workforce (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). Moreover, there remains a paucity of research on the career decision-making processes of Mexican American re-entry community college women (Arbona, 1990; Gomez et al., 2001; Rivera, Anderson, & Middleton, 1999).

Career literature reveals that investigations about the experiences of women's career decision making evolved approximately 20 years ago (Betz & Hackett, 1981, 1986; Juntunen, 1996; Luzzo, 1993; Luzzo, Funk, & Strang, 1996). The career literature also reveals four major investigational themes: (a) the career decision-making process, (b) factors associated with career decision making, (c) predictors of career decision-making self-efficacy, and (d) career research among non-traditional student populations. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn, following a brief overview of the historical foundation of career decision-making.

Historical Perspectives of Career Decision-Making

Rapidly changing work environments, working conditions, and the placement of workers in the early 1900s concerned Frank Parsons, an advocate of employment practices during the Industrial Revolution era (Brown & Brooks, 1990). As a result, he developed a career counseling model that helped workers select occupations based upon their interests—activities they liked to perform—and abilities—work they were capable of performing. His trait-and-

factor theory established the groundwork for many other career models that would later emerge.

Even in the 21st century, Parson's trait-and-factor model is what individuals expect when they

request career counseling. Individuals often expect a one-time meeting involving a perfunctory

process of career test administration, test result interpretation, career exploration, and decision

making (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Although this trait-and-factor theory remains a

prominent career counseling approach, it was not developed to consider gender and ethnic

minority differences or personal desire for change over one's lifetime (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

Ginzberg (1972) explains that occupational choice is a lifelong process of making career

decisions, especially if people wish to enjoy their work. This desire often leads individuals to

continuously evaluate the fit between their life goals and the world of work (Ginsberg, 1972).

Parson's trait-and-factor theory remained the most dominant career development model

throughout the 1950s. However, some career practitioners (Holland, 1985; Krumboltz, 1979;

Super, 1980) broke away from Parson's single decision-making event and expanded his theory to

a process involving developmental career decision-making stages. For instance, Super's (1980)

Life-Career Rainbow model describes five life stages of career development based upon the

individual's age. Super explains that individuals need to successfully complete one stage prior to

entering the next life stage. Although there is flexibility within the stage and age range, he

provides general guidelines of developmental tasks for each stage. Super describes the initial

stage as the *growth* stage, which may begin before age 10. This is where individuals develop

interests and preferences in the activities associated with world of work. The next life stage,

exploration, is normally experienced between the ages of 10 and 24. At this stage, the individual

becomes more aware of his or her interests, desires, and purpose-in-life as the individual enters

the workforce. Between the ages 25 and 40, the *establishment* stage signifies settling down and

securing a career which tends to be a long-term occupation. The *maintenance* stage, normally experienced between the ages of 40 and 65, represents accomplishment and credibility in the workplace. The last stage, *decline*, signifies a slower pace in life, such as completion of work. However, Brown and Brooks (1990) question the applicability of this model for lower socioeconomic female and minority group populations.

Brown and Brooks (1990) go on to say that although Super's initial career model did not address women's career decision making, Super later expanded his view by adding social, economic, and cultural factors that affect career decision making such as values, roles, and maturity. Super also expanded his stage and age theory (i.e., growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline) to explain that individuals experience a *process* when making career decisions. In essence, the authors explain that Super enhanced his focus by recognizing that stages manifest as a person ages, experiences career changes, and may transpire or reoccur simultaneously. An example of this could be that a 'decline' stage would not only happen at age 65 and older, but also at younger ages. A 'decline' behavior for an adolescent could be demonstrated by decreasing time with family and increasing time exploring individual interests at the 'growth' stage. Nonetheless, views of career decision making often explain why people make certain career choices, but not how people come to make these choices (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

A career development theorist who broke away from Parson's theory to explore how people come to make career decisions was John L. Holland (Brown & Brooks, 1990). Holland (1985) hypothesized that people make career choices according to activities they enjoy doing and tend to have specific work preferences. He categorized people's preferences—of mainly middle-class Caucasian males—and work environments into six specific personality domains including

R - realistic, I - investigative, A - artistic, S - social, E - enterprising, or C – conventional (Brown & Brooks, 1990). In essence, an individual may indicate interest in all six work environments; however, the three highest interest areas would provide a subtype. For example, a subtype of SCE would describe a person who shows interests in Social type occupations (helping others); Conventional type occupations (working with data and organization); and Enterprising type occupations (desire to lead or persuade others in an occupation). Occupations comprising all three work environment preferences would suggest optimum occupational matches. Some examples of optimum occupational matches to individuals with an SCE profile could be social workers, air traffic controllers, or human resources workers. Holland's three-letter code profiles are still used today for characterizing people into work environments despite gender concerns (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

Holland's theory undoubtedly inspired extensive research toward career decision making. However, researchers have debated gender bias in a widely used career instrument that employs Holland's classification system known as the *Self-Directed Search* (Brown & Brooks, 1990; Zunker, 1994). The major criticisms of this inventory are that it limits a woman's career choices and tends to point women toward three personality preferences and work environments —Artistic, Social, and Conventional (Zunker, 1994). Additionally, this theory assumes that individuals are aware of their own work-related interests, personality behaviors, and assumptions. Furthermore, many other traditional career choice instruments have been normed and based upon Caucasian, middle-class males (Brown & Brooks, 1990). This adds to the concerns of accurate career development and assessment results for women and ethnically diverse populations.

Although specific women's issues in career development were not addressed in the next

model described, Krumboltz's (1979) social learning model was one of the first theories that could be applicable to all persons, including women and ethnic minority individuals. Krumboltz (1979) applied social learning principles such as family influences, cognitive skill development, and emotional reactions to work environment preferences in order to explain how individuals make career choices. This culminating theory helped simplify the process of career selection that is based upon critical and defining life experiences that shape career decision making (Krumboltz, 1979). According to this theory, the four variables that influence career decision making involve (a) genetic endowments such as sex, race, and abilities; (b) environmental influences, such as socioeconomic status, labor laws, community influences, and training opportunities; (c) learned experiences, such as consequences of action and observed results of self or other's actions (i.e., vicarious reinforcement); and (d) task oriented skill sets, such as problem solving and work habit development (Krumboltz, 1979). Yost and Corbishly (1987) explain that personality may be developed from reactions and responses to environmental conditions. For instance, if individuals experience pleasure from performing a behavior, then that action may be repeated. However, if individuals experience discomfort from performing a behavior, then that action may be altogether avoided. Krumboltz (1979) also viewed life as an evolution of a person's interaction and reaction to the environment. This suggests that an individual's interests, personality, values, and worldview inevitably change throughout one's lifetime.

As a result of the earlier career decision-making models and their lack of applicability to women and ethnic minorities, Brown and Brooks' (1990) description of career counseling will be utilized. These authors describe career counseling as a personally guided process intended to help individuals explore career-related problems, such as internal (i.e., low self-efficacy or

resistance to change) and external (i.e., dissatisfaction in person-environment fit) disturbances or conflicts associated with making career decisions. Additionally, Brown and Brooks (1990) claim that if an individual has a difficult time recognizing and identifying his or her own strengths and weaknesses and is unable apply this knowledge to future situations, the individual may find career counseling discouraging rather than encouraging.

Gibson and Mitchell (2006) assert that in addition to the traditional steps of career counseling (e. g., self-awareness, occupation exploration, goal setting, and career decision-making), an implementation is needed to assist individuals through the process. Research presents various reasons why women generally have trouble making career decisions. These reasons can include, balancing work-life issues and managing responsibilities of full-time employment and having a family (Crosby, 1987; Luzzo 1995), a desire by some to take care of their children full-time (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), or previous negative work-related experiences such as discrimination and gender role expectations (Juntunen, 1996). Despite the reasons, the career decision-making process alone can be a challenging and vigorous process. Mihal et al. (1984) offer an exemplary model of the career decision-making process as a variety of thoughts and behaviors where the individual experiences internal (i.e., low career self-efficacy) and external (i.e., parents paying for college and suggest a specific career path) conflict. This conflict may motivate or discourage action. For instance, if the individual's action is perceived to be too difficult to achieve, then the individual may not follow through with the action (Mihal, et al., 1984). The authors explain that this process may also lead to alternative decision making. In addition, action or inaction may be influenced by one's convictions, perceptions, and values that lead to factors associated with making career decisions. The factors listed below are not exhaustive of all the factors associated with career decision-making. However, many

investigations have focused on career self-efficacy (CSE) and social cognitive career theories

(SCCT) as the premise for research in career decision-making for the 21st century.

Factors Associated with Career Decision-Making

Career Decision-Making Self-efficacy

In the early 1980s, career researchers investigated the applicability of Bandura's social

cognitive learning theory, also referred to as self-efficacy theory, to the process of goal setting

and decision making. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can perform a specific task toward

achieving a goal (Bandura, 1986). Bandura asserts that self-efficacy expectations can be learned

and modified via four processes: (a) performance accomplishments, for example, being

successful at a task; (b) vicarious learning, for example, job shadowing (observation) or exposure

to role models—seeing others be successful; (c) emotional arousal, which might encompass a

reduction of tension by incorporating anxiety management techniques, such as visual imagery,

relaxation training, self-talk, and journal writing that relates to positive or negative career

behaviors; and (d) verbal persuasion, which may be manifested by attending professional

conferences and support groups, or by reading texts relating to perseverance and confidence.

In an attempt to expand Bandura's self-efficacy approach to further understand how self-

efficacy expectations may influence women's career development, Betz and Hackett (1981)

explored career decision-making self-efficacy among men and women. This study indicated

significant gender differences in career self-efficacy for pursuing traditional and nontraditional

occupations. For instance, women viewed themselves as capable of completing academic

requirements related to traditionally female-dominated occupations such as dental support,

teaching, or office work. However, these women viewed themselves as incapable of performing

tasks associated with drafting, engineering, mathematics or other male-dominated occupations

(Betz & Hackett, 1981) regardless of their advanced skills in math and English. This study suggests the importance of counselors to help clients become more self-aware prior to making career decisions. Additionally, the authors suggested that women with high career self-efficacy for nontraditional occupations may be better prepared if the counselor communicates possible obstacles, such as being treated differently based upon gender, class, or status when entering nontraditional occupations (Betz & Hackett, 1981). Finally, Hackett and Betz (1981) suggest that it is not only important for counselors working with women to consider individual and social factors but to explore these women's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about performing traditional and nontraditional career-related behaviors.

Building upon previous career research, Taylor and Betz (1983) presented a study designed to measure the concept of Bandura's self-efficacy theory by developing an instrument known as Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSE). Career decision-making self-efficacy is described as the belief a person has within himself or herself to accomplish desired tasks needed to make career decisions (Bandura, 1977). The CDMSE was created to further understand career decision making and to explore career-related treatment options. The 50-question survey was formed by creating items that ask people about tasks and their behavior related to: (a) self awareness, (b) career exploration, (c) goal setting, (d) action planning, and (e) problem resolution (Taylor & Betz, 1983). The researchers found a positive relationship between individual beliefs in career decision-making abilities with career decisiveness. For example, students who have low belief in their perceived capability to accomplish specific tasks required for that career were more likely to be uncertain about choosing a career. In turn, Betz and Hackett (1986) summarize that career self-efficacy concepts provide a theoretical basis for understanding how women may make career decisions. The career self-efficacy concept

explains how belief expectations and perception with respect to a career behavior, may serve as a deterrent or a boost toward optimum career decision making and development. For instance, if a woman believes that she does not have enough time to pursue a career that requires more than two years of higher education, then she will not enter the profession despite having a high desire to enter that career. As these investigators hypothesized, expectations of personal self-efficacy did relate to whether or not an individual would pursue certain careers.

To further evaluate the concept of career self-efficacy and to evaluate the effectiveness of the CDMSE, Scheye and Gilroy (1994) examined the influence high school teachers and college professors have in relationship to students' selection of major in traditional and nontraditional careers. Results showed that participants from an all-female school who took classes with high school or college male teachers were more likely to select nontraditional careers than participants who took classes with female teachers. Scheye and Gilroy claim that male teachers may have positively influenced the student's attitude about entering male-dominated careers. This research positively corresponds with current literature on role models influencing women's career choices (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). This may also demonstrate support for two of Bandura's major tenets of self-efficacy expectations focusing on verbal persuasion and vicarious learning.

Lastly, linking and complementing the above career frameworks is an important evolving theory known as social cognitive career theory (SCCT) that emphasizes multiple activities that affect individual interests, career decisions, and career path achievement (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Hackett, 1987). Lent et al.'s (1996) research demonstrates how career self-efficacy, expectancy outcomes, and goal setting impact the individual, his or her support systems, and learning factors. Lent et al. emphasize the importance of extending Hackett and Betz's (1981) career self-efficacy model by adding other social

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cognitive components. Lent et al. also suggest exploring gender, ethnic, and cultural diversities that directly or indirectly influence individual career development processes. The authors acknowledge that situational and environmental experiences like access issues, occupational exposure, and performance expectations may positively or negatively affect learning opportunities leading to career choices. However, the authors assert that exploring advantageous social conditions may assist women and ethnic minorities to set goals and take action, thereby increasing career self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Brown and Lent's (1996) model (SCCT) suggests that (a) individuals develop occupational interests through the belief one has in accomplishing the duties associated with the occupation, which in turn produces behavioral expectations; (b) perceived barriers often determine the relationship between interest and choice; and (c) self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are strengthened by successful and unsuccessful experiences. Therefore, it is important for counselors to assist women and ethnic minorities through the process of exploring perceived barriers. This may facilitate an exploration of a wider range of occupations in addition to identifying career options that may have been avoided due to faulty self- and career-beliefs. The authors encourage counselors to provide information and options on how to overcome certain obstacles. An examination of various career decision-making contextual factors will be discussed below.

Diversity

Gender. Throughout the 1980s, much of the career decision-making self-efficacy research utilized Bandura's (1977, 1986) four principle activities and sampled a combination of men and women participants who were under 25 years of age. In addition, the majority of the research did not focus on or report ethnic or racial backgrounds. In the 1990s, career

practitioners (Foltz & Luzzo, 1998; Sandler, 2000; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000) started testing and confirming the psychometric properties of the CDMSE scale as having high internal consistency—when items in the scale consistently measure the intended construct (i.e., career decision-making self-efficacy) and high test-retest reliability—when the results of a repeated scale administration result in similar scores of the same test. In addition, the increase of women attending college (Lewin, 2006) and entering at 25 years of age and older (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997), career practitioners made a concerted effort to design career research for women, specifically re-entry, ethnic minority women.

In efforts to design a career intervention for women, Luzzo et al. (1996) explored the use of an 8-minute videotape incorporating one of Bandura's major tenets—verbal persuasion—to increase career self-efficacy. Luzzo et al.'s (1996) study involved a training intervention designed to persuade participants to reflect on previous career-related obstacles. The video was designed to persuade students that the quality and amount of effort exerted in academics would ultimately determine one's failure or success. This study showed an increase in career decision-making self-efficacy for college students who exhibited an external career locus of control after viewing the videotape. External career locus of control is described as an individual's belief that situations happen by chance or luck. These individuals often attribute their performance to the circumstances of the situation. However, the same treatment was not effective for students who indicated an internal career locus of control. Individuals with an internal career locus of control attribute accomplishments to their own achievement and motivation. For example, college students with an internal locus of control believe their grades are achieved by studying, whereas students with an external locus of control may believe their grades were the result of a professor who graded too easily.

In addition, Sullivan and Mahalik (2000) designed and evaluated a career group intervention incorporating Bandura's four principle activities. The goal of these six 90-minute group sessions stressed the process of career development by increasing career decision-making self-efficacy. The groups incorporated discussions and activities about self-esteem, role modeling, parental influences, societal messages, and learning about women's career development process. This study revealed that the women who participated in the career group intervention indicated an increase in career decision-making self-efficacy, willingness to explore various careers, and a commitment to pursue career goals. Finally, Sullivan and Mahalik (2000) assert that using Bandura's tenets of increasing self-efficacy in women-only group setting beneficially enhanced their career decision-making and social skills.

Age. Foltz and Luzzo (1998) conducted one of the first studies examining career decision-making self-efficacy of nontraditional-aged (i.e., 26 to 54 years of age) college women. However, all but four participants were Caucasian women. The study incorporated Bandura's four main tenets (i.e., verbal persuasion, emotional arousal, vicarious learning, and performance accomplishments) into two workshops. Volunteers participating in the workshops took career assessments, discussed career experiences, and enhanced their job readiness skills. The results demonstrated that nontraditional students who participated in the workshop showed that they had higher beliefs in their abilities in career decision making than the control group. Additionally, after the control group participated in the workshops, results indicated an increase in career decision making per the score on Taylor and Betz' (1983) CDMSE scale. The authors emphasize that the results of this investigation establish that counselors need to do more than solely depending on the results of career interest and skill testing. It is important that counselors ask individuals about all aspects of their lives when examining the process of career development

to include career beliefs (Foltz & Luzzo, 1998).

Nontraditional students. With continued researcher response to the increase of nontraditional college student populations, Sandler (2000) investigated career decision-making self-efficacy with participants who were primarily female (71.2%), 25 years of age and older, and had an ethnic classification of 51% White and 49% non-White. Sandler (2000) examined the adult learner's perceived stress as it relates to academic achievement and career decision-making processes. Other variables explored in this study were family, finances, student-life, grades, social factors, degree plan commitment, campus connection, and persistence. Based upon the results and of all the variables examined, the greatest variance in perceived stress was career decision-making self-efficacy. Variables directly relating to career decision-making self-efficacy included (a) academic integration, or how well students experienced a sense of belonging to the institution; (b) social integration, which involves how students perceived their ability to develop relationships; and (c) intent to persist, which involves student re-enrollment into the following semester. Sandler (2000) suggests that college administrators need to help adult learners by providing appropriate services:

> Institutions need to help adult students achieve their goals, and assist
> nontraditional learners with the critical development task of career
> decision-making and planning that remains at odds with the academic and
> social integration of adult students and their feelings of belonging. (p. 564)

Predictors of Career Decision-making Self-efficacy

To increase knowledge and understanding about the career decision-making self-efficacy needs of nontraditional college women, Quimby and O'Brien (2004) performed a study involving 354, mostly Caucasian (71%), women. The sample was separated into two groups.

One group had children, while the other group did not. The purpose of this research was to explore career and social support difficulties for both group samples. The findings of this study were consistent with previous research demonstrating that nontraditional college women felt comfortable in completing tasks needed toward achieving an educational goal (Luzzo, 1993). Nonetheless, the authors suggest the importance of assessing for potential and perceived career barriers and exploring the amount of social support and services available to nontraditional college women.

Additionally, Quimby and O'Brien's (2004) research unveiled specific career barriers for nontraditionally-aged college women such as balancing a variety of roles and discouragement from selecting male-dominated careers. The authors reported specific types of social support such as reassurance of worth, opportunity for nurturance, and social integration as strong predictors of student and career decision-making self-efficacy. These findings illustrate how Bandura's (1977, 1986) verbal persuasion influences can be fulfilled through building support groups. Finally, Quimby and O'Brien (2004) recommend further investigations of career self-efficacy among nontraditional college women to focus on factors such as stereotypical career myths, personal attitudes, career decision-making influences, and role conflicts.

In efforts to investigate predictors relating to career decision-making self-efficacy, Paulsen and Betz (2004) conducted a study involving female (55.5%) and male (44.5%) college students; however, ages were not reported. The ethnic composition of the sample was 80% Caucasian, 9% African American, 6% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic, and 2% other. The types of confidence variables investigated were mathematics, science, using technology, writing, leadership, and cultural sensitivity. All six variables accounted for almost 50% of the variance in career decision-making self-efficacy with the strongest predictor of career

decision-making self-efficacy being leadership. Additional findings indicated that confidence in cultural sensitivity was a significant predictor of career decision-making self-efficacy in women but not for men or African Americans. The authors of this study conjectured that students who communicate distress about their ability in making career decisions may also be deficient in their scholastic skills.

Career Research for Non-traditional Student Populations

Although research specific to career decision-making self-efficacy of nontraditional college women has grown in the last two decades, research on the process of career development and decision-making for Hispanics remains almost nonexistent (Arbona, 1990; Gomez et al., 2001). In speaking specifically about Mexican Americans, Caldera et al., (2003) claim that "literature has failed to explore the development of and engagement in career development processes that may lead to desirable vocational outcomes" (p. 309). In addition, the majority of current research conducted on Mexican American populations tends to represent high school aged-participants. Caldera et al. (2003), however, point out that Mexican American high school students may initially have high career aspirations but may not have the resources available to see those goals come to fruition. Consequently, these negative career experiences and inability to make career decisions may continue as they enter post-secondary education. Caldera et al.'s two-part study investigated similarities and differences between intrapersonal, family, and social factors (i.e., role identity, parental involvement, parent education, and acculturation) of Mexican American and White college women.

Caldera et al.'s study examined social and emotional attributes that influence the process of commitment to a selected career choice. Results of Caldera's et al.'s study indicated that Mexican American college women reported more instrumental rather than expressive

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characteristics than did their White counterparts. Instrumental characteristics are linked with male descriptors (e.g., independent, competitive, decision-maker), while expressive characteristics are described as conventional qualities of women (e.g., emotional, gentle, nurturing). Additionally, results indicated that Mexican American women wanted to achieve higher education and pay than their parents earned. This portion of the study reports acculturation as a nonsignificant predictor of commitment to career choices for Mexican American women.

Surprising results raised contradictory findings to the belief that family influences may be more important to Mexican American college women than to White American college women. As such, a replication of the first study was conducted with parent education being more closely matched. The second-study portion of this research showed less of a group difference in instrumentality and expressiveness. However, the authors note that the second-study sample represented first and second year students while the first-study sample represented third and fourth year college women. The authors deduce that the upper-level Mexican American college women may have developed characteristics, such as leadership qualities, as they increased their learning. Ultimately, the findings of this 2-part study suggest counselors need to be cognizant of the possible role that family may have on the development of Mexican American college women's career decisions. The authors also suggest that counselors explore whether or not Mexican American women clients want to mirror their parents' education or socioeconomic status. Caldera et al. convey that first-generation Mexican American college women may not have as much family and social support related to college achievement as their White counterparts, solely due to the limited college experiences of their parents.

In continuous efforts to explore the career development process of Mexican American

college students, Leal-Muniz and Constantine (2005) investigated predictors of career commitment. The study examined perceived support of parents, perceived options of careers, dysfunctional career myths, and the commitment to career decision-making processes, such as exploring occupations. The authors conveyed that lack of information and exposure of potential career choices may limit Mexican American college students' career options and academic pursuits. This research was conducted at a predominantly White university. Of the 204 participants of this research, 67% were female with age ranges of 17 and 24. The findings revealed that students who perceived that they had parental support tended to explore occupations that they may not have initially considered. Another positive predictive variable of perceived parental support was that students were more apt to commit to achieving educational goals. However, a student's perceived parental support was not predictive of the student disregarding a career decision. Results also indicated that students with perceived career barriers, such as ethnic or sex discrimination, were more apt to arbitrarily exclude certain career options. Additionally, for students who adhered to career myths (i.e., secretarial occupations as exclusively female jobs), the greater the chance for Mexican American college students to hastily disregard a career option. To address this problem, Leal-Muniz and Constantine (2005) stress that counselors need to provide adequate information to deflate career myths, thereby minimizing damaging assumptions about career opportunities open to this population.

The next three career research articles adding to career decision-making literature relating to college students consist of participants between the ages of 17 and 24. Additionally, participants include a combination of men and women with various ethnic backgrounds (i.e., Caucasian, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic). Although their contributions to the career literature are important, only a brief synopsis of the variables and the results for

Latino/Latina college students will be highlighted given the emphasis of this study.

Wolfe and Betz (2004) investigated the relationship of attachment variables to career decision-making self-efficacy and fear of commitment in making career-decisions. Results indicate that, for women, the bond with their mother and friends related positively to their belief in making career decisions. The findings indicate that students with lesser personal bonds or who have distrustful attachment styles may also have difficulties in making career decisions. The authors suggest that counselors working with students who rate themselves low in career decision-making self-efficacy may benefit from career decision-making interventions that heighten the exploration of occupations and environmental factors.

Constantine and Flores (2006) examined the relationships of psychological distress, perceived family conflict, and career development issues among students of color. The results of this investigation demonstrated that Latino/Latina students who believed they had more challenging family issues than others tended to struggle more in making career decisions or were ambivalent about selecting careers. Additionally, Latino/Latina American students who reported increased levels of psychological distress (e.g., depression or eating disorders) indicated higher degrees of career decision-making difficulties. Conversely, students who indicated low levels of family conflict were more likely to have high career aspiration. However, the authors point out that career certainty did not correlate with career aspirations for Latino/Latina American students. The authors suggest counselors explore family attitudes and reactions in relation to student career decision-making difficulties.

Osborn et al.'s (2007) research examined the use of a six-week career development course on the *dysfunctional career thoughts* of racially and ethnically diverse college freshmen. Dysfunctional career thoughts refer to ways of thinking that impede career decision-making and

problem-solving abilities (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1998). For example, if a student thinks that he or she is not smart enough in math, then that student may tend to overlook all careers requiring complex math skills. The six-week course involved self-assessment, career and academic options, workplace elements, and action planning. This study reported no differences in gender or race variables. However, overall results indicated that individuals who participated in the career intervention demonstrated less dysfunctional career thoughts specific to career decision making and external conflict.

Several studies reflect an increase in career research involving nontraditionally-aged ethnic minority students. Lopez and Ann-Yi's (2006) investigation examined career indecision predictors among women who were predominantly single and in their third or fourth year at a large southwestern university. Participant ages were between 18 and 53. The ethnic representation of the groups examined consisted of White (42.2%), Hispanic (24.7%), and African American (19.2%). The variables examined were career barriers, social support perceptions, barrier-related coping beliefs, and career decision-making self-efficacy. Surprisingly, the findings showed only one significant difference between the three groups; African American women believed they had more career challenges than did their White and Hispanic counterparts, which in turn affected their career development. The authors pre-supposed that "minority students with less favorable scores…either do not pursue college or else discontinued their college experience much earlier, resulting in greater similarity in career-related beliefs across racial/ethnic groups" (p. 41). Results also demonstrated that across all groups, examination of coping beliefs relating to perceived occupational and academic obstacles enhanced the ability to predict career indecisiveness. Lastly, results showed that career decision-making self-efficacy scores were not significant to participant's ability to making career choices.

A more recent community college study investigated how perceived barriers, role models, and acculturation influence career self-efficacy and career considerations of predominantly single Hispanic women. Rivera et al. (2007) explain that it is important to explore how various barriers such as financial constraints and low career expectations are perceived among Hispanic American students. The authors also state the importance of guiding Hispanic college women through the implementation stage of achieving their goals. Participants consisted of 131 women of whom 29.8% identified themselves as Dominican, 24.4% as Puerto Rican, 17.6% as Ecuadorian, 9.9% as Columbian, 3.1% as Salvadorian, and 15.3% as other Hispanic. A total of 60% reported being born outside of the United States. The ages ranged from 17 to 54. Over 50% of the participants had household incomes of less than $20,000. Although this present studies' specific research sample differs from an 'all Hispanic' population sample, its significance lies in its examination of Hispanic community college women 25 years of age and older.

Consistent with literature on the role of career self-efficacy in predicting career-related behavior, Rivera et al. (2007) reported results that showed career self-efficacy to be important when predicting student choices in both male- and female-dominated careers. Additionally, results indicated that perceived barriers directly influenced student selection of traditional, female-oriented career fields. For Hispanic women who related to Anglo acculturation, results indicated that this experience contributed significantly to the consideration of careers that were female-oriented. Conversely, women who identified with Hispanic acculturation indicated that Hispanic acculturation and role model influence were not related to their career self-efficacy. Lastly, the authors noted that when counselors work with Hispanic college women, it is important to assess their belief in their ability to perform tasks toward a career goal in order to

widen the range of occupations they normally would contemplate entering.

In comparison to quantitative career research about ethnic minority students, there is a dearth of qualitative research in career development and decision-making for Hispanic college students (Arbona, 1990; Gomez et al., 2001). In the past decade, however, counselors have employed qualitative methods to investigate understudied populations pertaining to career-related issues (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999; Hill, Ramirez, & Dumka, 2003; Okubo, Yeh, Lin, Fujita, & Shea, 2007; Shinnar, 2007). Fassinger (2001) emphasizes the need for using qualitative methods for research given that current career instruments may not be adequate, or too restrictive for nontraditional student populations. Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) agree that qualitative methods provide participants and researchers with an opportunity to gain insight into the participants' experiences to better understand the context in which their actions and behaviors are performed. In fact, only one study (Fisher & Padmawidjaja, 1999) was found that used a qualitative method to explore the career decision-making processes for women college students of Mexican descent.

Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) conducted a qualitative study exploring parental influences of career choices among African American and Mexican American college students. Twenty participants at a Midwestern university were randomly selected to be interviewed. Participant ages ranged from 19 to 21 years of age. Of the 20 college students, 11 were African American (9 women, 2 men) and 9 were Latino Americans (3 women, 6 men) all of whom identified as being from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) employed a semi-structured interview consisting of questions pertaining to four major social learning components (i.e., learning experiences, genetic endowment, task approach skills, and environmental conditions). The analysis of the student interviews revealed several areas where

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parents did influence the career development of these college students. The grouped categories described were parental encouragement, educational expectations, critical life events, vicarious learning, and work identity. A theme Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) elaborated on was that parental educational expectations stemmed from the desire to keep their children from experiencing hard times or to help prepare their children "for a world that does not expect them to succeed" (p. 145). Finally, the authors explicate another noteworthy finding on family values. They emphasize the need for creating value inventories pertaining to family values embraced by ethnic minorities, for instance, the sense of responsibility of "moving their race forward" (p. 146). Arbona (1990) adds to the importance of learning how Latino/a experiences and perceptions directly influence an individual's career and life goals, specifically when remaining in or dropping out of school.

Summary

Chapter two focused on providing a historical perspective of career decision-making theories and concepts. Descriptions of theoretical frameworks that may have attributed to all types of individuals were then highlighted. Next, the literature review revealed four major themes in the career literature including: (a) explanations of the career decision-making processes, (b) factors associated with career decision-making, (c) predictors of career decision-making self-efficacy, and (d) career research designed to explore non-traditional student populations.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This exploratory investigation was intended to gain insight about the career experiences and perspectives of Mexican American re-entry women attending a community college. The qualitative methodology employed focused on illuminating contextual factors that influence career decision-making of these participants, in addition to an exploration of the ways in which Bandura's four self-efficacy tenets contribute to their career experiences. Creswell (1998) suggests using a qualitative approach to explore social and human issues when

> (a) the research question employs an exploratory design, (b) exploring
> underrepresented populations, (c) there is a need to provide a comprehensive
> view of the research topic, (d) the researcher can study individuals in their
> natural setting, and (e) the role of the researcher is one of an active learner. (p. 17)

This qualitative research design assumes that participant perspectives are ever-changing and fluid (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) also reminds researchers that the rationale of a qualitative approach is not to prove a hypothesis as in a quantitative stance, but to explore common themes that emerge amongst participant career experiences.

Design of the Study

Phenomenological Approach

A phenomenological approach was used to understand the essence of a Mexican American re-entry woman's career decision-making experiences by exploring specific details about how participants perceive their career-experiences. This approach provided an opportunity for participants to describe their meaning of experiencing a specific phenomenon (Giorgi, 1970). Although phenomenology can be traced back to the 19th century with Kant and Hegel's major philosophical study of how individuals perceive their mind to be, Edmund Husserl, a German

philosopher, reignited phenomenology in the 20th century. He argued that

> to arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored,
> and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal
> consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure "phenomena" and the only
> absolute data from where to begin. (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4)

Moustakas (1994) further asserts that phenomenology looks at how people see their lives by first becoming more aware of their own preconceived judgments, assumptions, and biases. Hence, increased self-awareness fosters a different and refreshed way of viewing life circumstances.

Epoche

Moustakas (1994) states that *epoche* is the first step to conducting a phenomenological study. Epoche is a Greek word that means to avoid judgment and to suspend perceiving experiences through general beliefs. Moustakas (1994) states that this stage helps train researchers to see everyday occurrences in an open way. As a result, the researcher identified biases that surrounded issues of what she perceived to be Hispanic cultural traditions, including gender-role stereotypes, personal and career identities of women, and women's empowerment, including levels of self-confidence, independence, and self-reliance. Also, educational issues, such as access to information about career and educational opportunities, and the value placed on education for ethnic minority women of lower socioeconomic statuses were recognized as assumptions. The qualitative approach employed required the researcher to bracket or write down personal views and beliefs before, during, and after the data collection and analysis of the data. The career interview questions were aligned with the goals of this study and addressed the following research questions: (a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences, (b) What do Mexican American re-entry college

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women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes, and (c) To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy expectations substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry community college women?

Research Site

The community college selected as the research site was located in a southern metropolitan community in Texas. During 2008, there were 22,739 students who attended this institution. According to the college's Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (2008), this college's ethnic population was 47% Hispanic (n=10,776), 42% White (n=9,647), 5.3% Black (n=1,212), and 4.9% Other (n=1,104). Additionally, the 2008 report cited gender statistics as male, 41.2% (n=9,384) and female, 58.7% (n=13,355).

Besides the majority of the student population at this site being female and Hispanic, there were other reasons this community college was selected. First, this site was the only community college in the city that had a specific center serving women and nontraditional student populations. Second, I was pre-exposed to this college population via my part-time employment in the center since 2006. This provided me ample time in the field to learn about the culture in order to develop a deeper understanding of the population. Third, in terms of research recruitment strategies, this provided me direct access to the sample and to other counseling services. And finally, the on-site center would make it more convenient for all participants to be interviewed in one location and between their scheduled classes.

Sample and Population

Purposive sampling was used for this investigation given its consideration as one of the most popular types of non-probability sampling in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Criterion

purposive sampling is most appropriate because it targets a particular subgroup of people who have experienced the topic being researched (Creswell, 1998). Although, Creswell (1998) suggests that 10 participants are sufficient for non-probability sample sizes, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that researchers generally did not receive new data after the first 12 interviews. Therefore, my targeted goal was to interview 12 students. It is also pre-supposed that this sample decided to enroll into college after a career decision-making experience occurred. The 12 participants who were interviewed met the following criteria:

- Self-identified as female of Mexican American descent;

- 25 years of age and older; and,

- Currently in their first-year of enrollment at the research site.

Instrumentation

    Informed consent. All participants were informed verbally and in writing of the purposes, benefits, and risks of the research study during the initial orientation meeting. Each participant was informed of how confidentiality and data from the interview tapes and transcripts would be maintained. Participants were informed about the use of pseudonyms in the research in order to protect their anonymity. Two participants wanted to use their own names, however, I explained the importance of confidentiality and anonymity. Two participants selected their own pseudonym and the other names were created by using a name containing the first letter of their first name. This was done so that I could more easily match the story to the participant.

    Interview. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 Mexican American women who were enrolled in a Texas public community college were conducted. The interviews occurred during the 2009 spring semester. All interviews were tape recorded and conducted by the researcher. The interviews were conducted in a college campus office and lasted approximately

1.5 hours.

      Interview questions. Fifteen questions were developed by the researcher to ensure

participant responses would address the three research questions (Appendix C). Glesne (1999)

recommends using a presupposition questioning technique. This type of questioning uses an

introduction to help participants ease into answering questions. For instance, instead of asking

short-answered questions such as "Tell me about the first time you remember making a career

decision?" The researcher began a question with "When you were growing up and someone

asked "What do you want to do when you grow up? What would you say?" This technique

helped participants recapture the feelings or thoughts associated with a previous event.

Additional open-ended questions were constructed to address Bandura's (1977, 1986) four major

self-efficacy tenets to include (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious learning, (c)

emotional arousal, and (d) verbal persuasion. Each participant was asked 15 questions in the

same order. The researcher probed for responses if needed for clarity and understanding of the

participant's response. Following the career interview, the researcher asked participants to

elaborate on any of the specific career issues mentioned during the original responses.

      Interview development. The researcher conducted a pilot interview to explore

problematic areas in the data-collection portion of this research and to determine how

participants might respond to pre-developed interview questions. An audio-taped trial interview

was conducted with one currently-enrolled college student who satisfied the participant criteria

The volunteer filled out the demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form addressing

her specific role in the research study. Based upon the participant's feedback, the researcher did

not revise any questions. The pilot interview also aided in the bracketing experience, checking

the use of the recorder, and assisting in the approximation of interview length.

Interview transcriptions. The audio-tapes were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the researcher. The researcher contacted each participant approximately 2 to 3 weeks after the interview to verify the accuracy of the data during a follow up interview. The follow-up meeting was conducted at the time and place of the participant's choosing. Ten of the 12 participants verified the data transcriptions. The other two participants did not respond to my attempts to reach them. Ten participants each received a $25.00 gift certificate during the transcript verification meeting.

Data Collection

Recruitment

Volunteers were recruited in several ways that included (a) informing and requesting counselors at the college's Center for Women and Nontraditional Students to refer qualified candidates for the research, (b) presenting the research study to a Nontraditional student activity organization and to a women-only student development/orientation class, and (c) distributing informational flyers around campus requesting volunteers.

Initial orientation. Prospective participants were instructed to contact the researcher for an initial orientation meeting that lasted approximately 20 minutes. At the initial meeting, participants were provided with a description of the project and information on the audio-taping procedures. Consent was obtained via a written consent form (Appendix A), demographic data (Appendix B) was collected, and any questions from the participant were answered at this time. Participants selected for the study were informed that they would receive a $25.00 honorarium in appreciation of their participation. This information was posted in the research recruitment flyers and consent forms. Each participant was asked to participate in a follow up interview to verify the data transcription.

Materials. A brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) was provided during the

initial orientation meeting, which took no more than 10 minutes to complete. The demographic

questionnaire consisted of components addressing sex, ethnicity, age, relationship status, last

school attendance, number and age of children, if any, annual income, educational status, college

credit hours, grade point average, employment status, weekly work hours, and residency status.

Each interview was recorded on a separate cassette tape labeled with the participant's

pseudonym.

Storage of data. A file for each participant was created and locked inside a cabinet in a

university graduate assistant office. The documents included in each file were the informed

consent form, the demographic questionnaire, any notes or bracketing taken during and after the

interview, and any additional communication made between the participant and the researcher.

Separate from participant file storage, all tape recordings, flash drives, transcriptions, and

material with links to participant identity were stored at the researcher's home office in a locked

drawer. These files were accessible only to the researcher.

Data Explication

1. Bracketing. Yeh and Inman (2007) explain the importance of the researcher

experiencing the process of identifying and bracketing his or her own assumptions and

expectations about the research topic prior to data collection. As a result, I bracketed my

reactions, expectations, values, and assumptions about the phenomenon before, during, and after

interviewing participants. In addition, the researcher went through the Epoche stage, which is a

related bracketing concept. Therefore, bracketing interpretations during the interview

development stage, while listening to the recorded interviews, transcribing the interviews, and

reading the interview transcriptions, is crucial so as to remain as true to the data as possible. The

researcher created a document listing all bracketed interpretations and assumptions. Hycner (1985) also recommended keeping a journal to note specific issues that may arise with regard to general impressions of the participants and their career experiences. A separate comment document was created to organize journal notes. This technique also helps the researcher be more aware of her own reactions to all the data. The researcher kept all bracketed and journal notes in each participant's file.

2. **Significant statements.** Tapes were transcribed approximately three weeks after the interview. I split a Microsoft Word document into three columns. The first column contained the research question to be answered. The second column contained the transcribed portion of the interview. The third column was used to annotate significant participant quotes and researcher interpretations (Hycner, 1985). I then searched for significant statements about how the phenomenon was experienced.

3. **Significant statements start list.** Significant statements and interpretations located in the third column were comprised as a *start list* (Hill et al., 1997) under each participant name in order to manage the data. This was accomplished to elicit participant meanings and to locate similar statements amongst the participants. I highlighted similar themes by either circling them with same colored markers or doing a word-find via Microsoft Word with the other participant lists. This helped to reduce the start list and helped with the next step of creating statements of meaning.

4. **Statements of meaning.** During this step, I grouped the statements into similar meaning units. For instance, if a statement included a message about their parents, I would group them together. For example, one participant indicated that she received no guidance from her parents, "I didn't really have my parents saying this is what you have to do, so basically

whenever you're not told um, you really don't know." Another participant stated that "the support wasn't there from my Mom, my mom would say, come on be realistic. So she never really pushed the college thing." And another participant expressed that "I had always wanted to go to college, but my mother had never gone to school. And she never thought it was necessary to go to college." As Creswell (1998) suggests, I listed their personal statements and my interpretations of the participant's responses (e.g., textural descriptions).

5. **Eliminating similar and related statements.** As Hycner (1985) suggests, I deleted repetitive participant statements and pasted them onto an outline (see Appendix D) in order to assess the frequency of each theme. This elimination was conducted five times until all similar or related statements were extracted.

6. **Themes of meaning.** After the meaning statements for each interview were organized, the researcher clustered common theme meanings together. Hycner (1985) warns researchers that this step is the largest threat to the analysis process because it has the highest potential for researcher bias. Subjectivity may cause the researcher to overlook important themes and meanings, and the researcher may subconsciously identify or emphasize only those themes or findings that confirm the researcher's expectations (Hycner, 1985). I was conscientious about noting which statements went under which meaning clusters or themes. Using Microsoft Word, I created an initial outline of common themes and transferred each participant's direct quote onto the document under the theme. This technique easily showed how many participants indicated similar themes. The next section will describe steps the researcher took toward minimizing the impact of bias in this study.

7. **Independent auditors to verify themes.** The researcher included external auditors to strengthen the study. The two auditors combined had over 30 years experience in the counseling

field and had recent experience conducting qualitative research. They were selected to review

the findings and to make suggestions regarding themes. The auditors were each asked to review

six participant narratives. The researcher then met with each auditor to discuss theme

suggestions. There was significant agreement between researcher and auditor themes. However,

both auditors suggested a potential sub-theme that may have been missed had this step not been

included; more details will be presented in Chapter Four.

      8. Depiction of themes relevant to research questions. I organized the themes under

the three research questions: (a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe

their career decision-making experiences, (b) What do Mexican American re-entry college

women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes, and, (c) To what

extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance

accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy expectations substantiated in the career

decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? The career

interview questions were created to reflect the research questions. Therefore, through continuous

review of the participants' responses to the interview questions and continued reduction of the

lists, the researcher determined whether or not the participant directly or indirectly responded to

the research questions.

      As the researcher reviewed themes relating to the research questions, a distinction of

where the themes were placed was crucial. In essence, the first research question relates to

describing career decision-making experiences. The second research question elicits influential

factors in career decision making. The researcher deciphered which statements went under

which question by delineating the time and order of decision making. Hence, themes that

described the participant's worldview while she was growing up were categorized under the first

question and themes that influenced her decision to return to school were categorized under the second question. Participant statements that were not relevant to the research questions were deleted. In addition, I categorized participants by age to see if other generational themes emerged.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Researchers must be aware of potential threats to the validity of a phenomenological investigation. Creswell (1998) suggests using several strategies to increase the validity and trustworthiness of an investigation. The strategies the researcher used for this investigation included

a) Prolonged engagement. My three-year employment at the research site provided me ample time to learn about the non-traditional student population culture and to gain the trust of the participants.

b) Clarifying researcher bias. This strategy provided me an opportunity to self-reflect so readers would have a better understanding of me and the experience of the topic being researched.

c) Member checks. Member checking provided me an opportunity for participants to check and verify the data collected. Each participant in this study was contacted and provided the opportunity to verify interview transcripts for accuracy; 10 of the 12 participants actually verified the data. The other two participants were unreachable, and

d) Rich, thick description. Participant voices have been presented to provide a sense of their attitudes and communication styles. Additionally, an interview development technique was added to enhance the quality of the interview questions, the interview

process, and the bracketing experience.

Ethical Considerations

Federal regulations are put in place to protect research participants (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). I have successfully completed specialized ethics training provided by the university. According to this training, the three basic ethical principles that lie behind all human subject research studies involve respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. These principles were adhered to by the following strategies:

Respect for persons. Each participant was informed that participation in this qualitative investigation is done on a volunteer basis with the opportunity to discontinue at any time. The researcher informed participants of the research purpose, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and consent during the initial meeting. The researcher did not use participant names for the sake of anonymity. Each participant was treated with dignity and respect. All participants were provided with contact information of the dissertation chair and University's IRB office to report any breaches of the research protocol.

Beneficence. All participants were informed of the benefits and risks involved in volunteering in this research investigation. Each participant was provided with referral information for the college's women counseling center and of the career center, when appropriate.

Justice. The recruitment and selection of each participant was clearly stated for the purpose of the research study and was stated verbally and orally to the participant.

Summary

Chapter three described the methodology, the sample, procedures, and data collection and analysis steps. A description of the qualitative method used for this study was detailed. In

addition, personal assumptions and biases were identified to address issues of influence during

the data collection and analysis of the research. Finally, this chapter discussed the ethical

considerations and principles of this study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study explored the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American women returning to college who were 25 years of age and older. The questions that guided this investigation were: (a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences, (b) What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes, and (c) To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy beliefs substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? A phenomenological approach was used to examine the essence of participant perspective by exploring how participants perceived their career experiences. Verbatim responses are presented for the reader to gain a greater awareness of the participants' attitudes and communication styles. The essence of their stories was preserved by changing the question-answer responses into narratives. Hence, the interview questions were left out and some minor grammatical and sentence structure changes were made to make their stories flow with ease. Colloquial expressions were also kept in the narratives to keep the material authentic. Specific locations and names of companies were removed.

A brief introduction of each participant is presented in the first part of this chapter along with participant demographics. Thereafter, the researcher uncovers themes as they relate to how participants describe their career decision-making experiences. Common themes that influenced participants' career decisions will follow. Finally, Bandura's four tenets of self-efficacy as they relate to career decision making will be addressed.

Participants

Twelve volunteers who recently made the decision to return to school participated in this study. The participants self-identified as currently attending a community college, as being Mexican American, and as being 25 years of age and older. Table 1 presents a portrait of participant demographics listed in alphabetical order.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Relationship Status	Income Per Year	Credit Hours	Grade Point Average
1. Amanda	55	Divorced and Single	<$20,000	38	3.0
2. Angel	29	Single	<$10,000	1	3.0
3. Beatrice	50	Married	<$20,000	6	4.0
4. Charlene	32	Single	<$30,000	78	.8
5. Christa	36	Single	<$20,000	83	3.0
6. Janet Marie	30	Single	<$10,000	13	2.5
7. JoAnn	38	Divorced and Single	<$10,000	0	0
8. Juliette	40	Divorced and Single	<$20,000	24	2.1
9. Nelda	27	Married	<$20,000	0	2.5
10. Reba	33	Widowed and Single	<$10,000	26	2.3
11. Renee	56	Divorced and Single	<$10,000	0	2.0
12. Rosa Linda	49	Single	<$30,000	32	3.8

Participant Introductions

General introductory questions were asked at the beginning of the career interview in order to help participants feel at ease. The initial questions (see Appendix C) were also asked to help participants describe their career decision-making experiences in reference to research question 1. The information presented was also gathered from the demographic form, observational notes, and additional information shared by the participants before and after the interview, as well as when the individual verified accuracy of the interview transcription.

The last time participants attended an institution of higher education was an average of 10 years before their current enrollment. Participant ages ranged from 27 to 56. Ten of the 12 participants were single, and all but one of the participants had children. Five participants earned under $10,000; five participants earned between $10,001 to $20,000; and, two participants earned between $20,001 to $30,000 a year. The following section provides a brief profile of each participant. Renee is introduced by a full narrative that reflected her life experiences as they related to career decision making. Her story is presented in whole because it represents several major and minor themes highlighted throughout the entire sample.

Amanda. Amanda was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 55 years of age and a single parent of five children, ages 16, 18, 19, 25, and 35. She got married at the age of 17 to a military service member. After several years of marriage, she divorced then remarried another military service member. Her second marriage recently ended. She last attended college in 2007. She is majoring in Criminal Justice. Her previous types of employment were grocery bagger, appliance repair shop supervisor, and women's shelter coordinator. Her ideal job is to be an attorney. She currently works part-time while attending college.

Angel. Angel was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 29 years of age and a single parent of two children, ages 2 and 3. She recently moved to San Antonio from Florida to leave her boyfriend and to improve her lifestyle. Her plans were to live with some of her relatives. However, when she arrived, she encountered problems with her family, so she moved into a homeless, transitional shelter. She had previously worked as a fast food worker, customer service representative, telemarketer, secretary, warehouse assembler, and a nurse's aide. Her ideal job is to work as a makeup artist and hairstylist. She last attended college 8 years ago. She currently works part-time in an art gallery while attending college full-time. She is

undecided in her major.

Beatrice. Beatrice was born in Piedras Negras, Mexico. She moved to San Antonio when she was 6 years old. She is 55 years of age, has been married over 30 years, and has two children, ages 22 and 30. She last attended college 25 years ago. She decided to return to college when her husband got laid off from work last year.   She was in her second semester back to college.   She had previously worked 19 years as a production worker. She had also worked as a waitress and an office helper. Her ideal job would be involved serving, networking, and helping the community, children, or senior adults. She currently works part-time while attending college. Her major is in Public Administration.

Charlene. Charlene was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 32 years of age and was 22 years old when her mother passed away. She last attended college in 2001. Her grade point average in her Biology major is 0.8. She has high hopes of becoming a physician assistant. She refers to her previous jobs, including cashier, marketer, waitress, and phone operator, as being "crappy." She currently works part-time with older adults while attending college.

Christa. Christa was born in Houston, Texas. She is 36 years of age and has one child who is 14 years old. Her child does not currently live with her because of her lifestyle choices and time spent in prison. Her hobby is running marathons. She took up running as part of her health-care and to deter her from using drugs. She last attended college 9 years ago. She currently works part-time as an assistant for an athletic club president. She had previously worked as an administrative assistant, a waitress, an office manager, computer graphics designer, engineering tech, and a grant writer.

Janet Marie. Janet Marie was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 30 years of age and has one 13 year old son with special needs. She last attended college 8 years ago. Her ideal

employment would be to work as a Child Psychologist, a Criminal Profiler, or in the area of animal care. She previously worked in retail and the banking industry. She attends college full-time and is not currently employed.

JoAnn. JoAnn was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 38 years of age and a single parent of five children, ages, 2, 6, 13, 20, and 22. Her youngest child is living in a hospital with a terminal illness. She conveys that all her relationships with men have been abusive. She last attended college in 1995. This is JoAnn's first time in college. She is taking courses toward a licensed chemical dependency counselor credential. She previously worked in call centers and had worked 19 years at a printing press company.

Juliette. Juliette was born in Brady, Texas. Juliette recently celebrated her 40th birthday and is a single mother of three children, ages, 5, 14, and 20. She was recently laid off from a mortgage company after working there for 17 years. Her previous employment was working in the dental and banking industries. She last attended college in 1988. This is her second semester back to school. She is currently taking courses toward an Associate degree in Business Management. Her ideal job would be to work in a Human Resources department.

Nelda. Nelda was born in San Antonio, Texas. At the age of 27, she is in her third marriage and has two children, 4 and 5 years old. She last attended school in 2000. This is Nelda's first semester in college. She is currently taking courses toward a degree in Business Management. She had previously worked at a department store and a hotel. She has been working at a fast-food restaurant for the past 6 years.

Reba. Reba was born in Houston, Texas. She is 33 years of age and has one daughter who is 12 years old. She does not have custody of her child due to her previous lifestyle choices. She is widowed and has served some time in prison for a narcotic related offense. She recently

moved in with her mother to return to college. She last attended college 6 years ago. She is

majoring in Counseling Psychology. She would like to work with abused and neglected

children. Her previous employment experience involved customer service, office, and restaurant

work. She tends to have a difficult time finding employment because of her criminal

background. However, she is currently working part-time in a call center.

     Renee. Renee is 56 years of age and recently moved to San Antonio from another

metropolitan area in Texas. Her three adult children, ages 19, 21, and 22, live in another town

and are unaware that she has moved to San Antonio to live in a battered women's shelter. She

previously worked in non-profit organizations as an office helper and a project coordinator. She

last attended college 25 years ago. This is her first semester back to school, and she is currently

taking courses toward a degree in Paralegal studies. Her ideal job would be to be an attorney,

working with disadvantaged children in Hawaii. She related the following.

     When I was growing up, I really didn't think I was going to be anything other

than a housewife. As I got older in high school, I wanted to go to college. I thought of

being a lawyer or a judge or something like that, but instead I went to an occupational

therapy vocational training program in a community college. The reason I studied

occupational therapy was because I couldn't go to college to study something else. I had

always wanted to go to college, but my mother had never gone to school. We taught her

how to read and speak English and write a little bit. And she never thought it was

necessary to go to college. So, when I was in high school I wanted to go to college but

she kept saying no, we don't have the money I needed to be home. I had a younger

brother and sister, my mother worked and I used to take care of them when I got home

from school. My mother worked nights. And, she just relied on me to take care of the

kids so she said I really couldn't go to college.

I was determined to go to college. So as a senior I started looking into colleges, and I thought I would look into Texas Woman's University because I thought mom would accept that better there since it was all women. So, I applied to the school and filled out all the paperwork for financial aid and did everything I needed to do, but what I was doing was forging my mom's signature because I was underaged. I received some scholarships from financial aid, and I had been saving a little bit of money at the time. I went along as if nothing [was going on], but I thought when the time comes, I was going to buy a bus ticket [out of town]. So when the time came I packed up some stuff, took a bus, and I didn't tell anyone where I was going.

I ran away from home to go to college. When I got to the university, it was real difficult. In my home town, I was top of my class, but it was mainly Hispanic students. There was a high dropout rate, and uh, the teachers didn't really seem interested that we got a good education. So when I got to the university, I was really far behind, it was a real struggle.

It was a week before finals when my mom found out where I was. And she and my brother went to go pick me up, and it just so happened that they saw me walking across the street. They told me to get in the car, and I was only 17, so I got in the car. So, we drove home and we didn't even get my stuff or nothing.

Then I told my mom that I wanted to work and that's when I ended up taking that vocational training for occupational therapy assistant. And that's what I did for like three years and then I got married. And uh, by then my brother and sister were a little older. I was still in charge of taking care of them even though I was married. But they didn't need

much taking care of. And I really didn't work when I was married with my first husband because he didn't want me to work, so I did a lot of volunteer work.

I tried to tell [my siblings] that it was necessary for them to go to college and get an education, but I think the problem was that I was a child trying to raise children, and I didn't do a very good job of it. And I felt real guilty for a while about that, but then I realized that I was a child myself and that I didn't know how.

When I got married [the first time], I knew right away that it was a mistake. One of the reasons I got married, I think, was because I didn't know how to say "no." This person is asking me this very serious question and wanted something very serious from me, and I was raised to say yes. And then, while I was married, I wanted to go to school, but my husband kept telling me that I didn't need to go school.

It took me seven years to get the courage to leave [my husband]. I shouldn't have gotten married in the first place. Then I did various office jobs, some work in the hospital. But the jobs I got wasn't so much because of what I knew or my skills, but it was because I was very petite, pretty, sexy little girl. And I always looked like I was 18 even though I was in my twenties and always looked thin and sexy. I always dressed real well and would apply for jobs and smile, and I would get the job.

But I've always known that you have to get an education to get a good job and as I got older and as I no longer was that cute sexy young girl, I can't go into an office and smile and get a job now, and when I was that cute, sexy, young girl and got whatever job I wanted. I never saw myself at 56 years old trying to get a job and needing an education. Because when I did start looking for a job about two years ago, I could not believe that I got absolutely no response whatsoever, especially since now-a-days the employers expect

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you to go online to apply. And when you get to that question about education and they have all that space to write in your education and you just put that one line you know, you're just a high school graduate.

Also, I talked to the lady who is in charge of the education programs in the shelter, she was the one who referred me to the [community college's women center]. I don't know if I would have gotten here if she hadn't pointed me in this direction. I don't know that I would have thought that I could go to college if I hadn't come to [the women center]. Like, [the counselor] really just telling me that other women like me are doing this all the time and that there's help, financial help. Like the women center, it helps to just go in there and talk to someone briefly, just for encouragement. I try to stop by the women center because it's very uplifting to talk to the counselors in there. I remember how helpful it was when the counselor was listening to me, and I was crying, but it's a big influence and it makes a lot of difference to have somebody there, to know that there's people there, to know that there's people you can turn to.

Despite the many potentially discouraging circumstances for Renee to attend college, she was determined to be successful in college. During the career interview, she seemed to be cognizant of potential physical, mental, and emotional challenges; yet, seemed to be up for the challenge. After asking Renee if anything transpired for her during the career interview, she responded with the following statements and provided a few examples of ways to help other people under similar career circumstances.

Um, well, it made me stop and think that when you're younger you never think that you're going to get older. I remember my first job, they mentioned things like retirement, and I remember thinking retirement, are you kidding? I need this extra money now. But

now, I make sure and tell my kids, to be sure to go into the 401 k plan, you'll have over $300,000 by the time you're whatever. So it made me think of that.

And also, to try to encourage kids, not just my kids, but other younger kids, to think about the future, or to tell them that they're not going to stay young forever. But I think if you give actual examples of what could happen if you plan or don't plan when you're younger. I mean look at me, I think if I would have finished Texas Woman's University my life would have gone in a totally different direction, like me now, I wouldn't be sitting here with no job, no place to live, without different things.

And uh, someone asked me not too long ago, a younger woman, she asked me, "where do you go every day?" I told her that I was going to [the community college]. She said, "the community college?" and I said, "yes" and she said, "you're going to the community college, why, and how old are you?" And I told her [my age] and "because I'll probably live 30 more years, and I don't want to live 30 more years doing this same thing when I'm 30 years older." And that's what I was telling her. I told her, take herself for example, you haven't finished high school, and if you don't do anything about it now, then 30 years will pass by and you still don't have a high school diploma. And she started thinking about it. I mean she saw me, this old lady, going back to school, and I'm doing it. Basically, when it gets right down to it, the reason I came to college was so that I can have a better standard of living.

Rosa Linda. Rosa Linda was born in San Antonio, Texas. She is 49 years of age and has one adult son who is 25 years old. She last attended college in 1998. This is her first semester back to school. She is taking classes toward a degree in Business Administration. She works full-time as an attorney's secretary while attending college part-time. She also earns

money on a part-time basis as a manicurist. Her ideal job is to be an attorney.

The themes in the next section were placed accordingly in response to the three research questions. Each research question is followed by major and minor themes.

Participants' Descriptions of Career Decision Making

Several themes unfolded as participants shared their stories about their early career decisions. The seven emerging themes included parental messages, spontaneous career paths, helping others, volunteerism, religious faith, resource awareness and acquisition, and familial responsibilities. Themes in which four or less participants articulated similar statements were also reported as minor themes. The minor themes included gender role priorities, first generation college students, saying "no", and the media.

Parental Messages

A major theme that emerged from participant statements as they described their career decision-making experiences was parental messages. Eleven participants revealed difficulties in making career decisions because of what their parents did or did not say. In some cases, participants did not pursue a specific career because they did not receive encouraging messages from a parent. The majority of the participants articulated receiving career-related messages from their mothers and only a couple of participants reflected on career advice received from their fathers. Juliette stated that she never really thought about making a career choice when she was younger. She expressed:

> I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself. I didn't really have my parents saying
> this is what you have to do, so basically whenever you're not told um, you really
> don't know. Um, I know when I was younger I didn't think about anything. It
> wasn't until I was getting older, but I remember it being difficult.

After Juliette was laid-off from her 17-year career in the mortgage industry, she made her decision to return to college at 40 years of age. In another example, Angel had difficulties making a career decision because her mother was unsupportive of her interests in art:

When I was in High School I wanted to be an Artist or Art teacher because I was good at it. I mean, I won awards and everything. But the support wasn't there from my Mom. My mom would say, 'come on be realistic.' So she never really pushed the college thing. So basically, I don't think she saw it as that important.

Angel reported that her mother does not have a high school education; therefore, her mother was not aware of its importance.

Conversely, Charlene and Christa indicated that their mother encouraged them to do whatever they wanted to do when they were younger. Sadly, both of their mothers passed away within the last 10 years. Hence, they no longer received guidance or encouragement from someone who was very important to them. Charlene alluded to not being shown the steps in pursuing a career and Christa indicated that she had no one to help her make decisions. Charlene noted:

I just didn't know how to get it. Nobody ever told me I could do these things. And now I'm older, unfortunately, 10 years later, I learned that I can do that. My mom was the one who was empowering me, but after she passed away, I didn't have anybody.

The other participant, Christa, articulated that she felt encouraged by her mother to pursue any career. However, she received no instruction on how to pursue her career choices:

There's never been a real guide in helping me [make career decisions]. Even though my parents did great, they weren't really organized or really didn't plan for

retirement. And they didn't plan for any kind of future like that, so there was no

real direction. Um, other than that, I just chose jobs and said, you know, I want to

do that, so that has pretty much been the way I choose careers, not much decision

making. It's been pretty random. I feel like a hippie sometimes with no direction.

Christa has maintained a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. However, her indecision

was still reflective by her earning over 80 college credits toward no specific major. The only

reason she returned to college was to increase her technological knowledge of graphic-design

software. While Christa and Charlene were encouraged by their mothers, Janet Marie and Nelda

were the only two participants who conveyed that they were encouraged by their father to earn

their own money and educations. Nelda conveyed

> My dad said, 'I can buy you some things but not everything you want. So it's up to
>
> you if you want other things you're going to have to work and save money.' He's
>
> the one who taught me how to drive at 11. He's the one who taught me how to do
>
> other things, like get a bank account. I had my first car because of him.

Nelda exhibited confidence in her ability to stay at the same fast-food facility for the past 6

years. She has continued to increase her job responsibilities. Janet Marie's father was a little

more explicit in the need to seek career options available and to acquire the higher education

required for those occupations. Janet Marie stated that her father advised her to

> get a good job. There's always career choices out there. I had to make sure I had a
>
> career option. He first stated to me about jobs out there and said, "you have to get an
>
> education."

Spontaneous Career Paths

Another major theme that emerged as participants were describing their career-decision-

making experiences was entering unplanned careers. Ten of the 12 participants indicated that because they experienced financial constraints they entered careers without planning them or to meet basic survival needs. Five of the participants were undecided about the type of career to enter so they gained employment wherever they could get hired. Five of the 12 participants believed they were not qualified for the jobs they entered and explained that they were at the right place and the right time. Three of the participants indicated that they entered careers that did not require much effort or entered a variety of careers as they searched for the one that fulfilled them the most. As a result, they entered occupations randomly with no "game" plan. Angel was just happy to graduate high school, she responded with

> I don't know what I wanted to do. I just wanted to graduate. If I did graduate,
>
> I would be the first one in the family to graduate high school.

Juliette spent 17 years in the mortgage industry without planning to remain in the field that long:

> Um actually, I really don't know. Personally I didn't know what I wanted to
>
> do with myself. What I really wanted to do I didn't find out until recently. I
>
> mean, everything that I've done, title and positions, to me it's kind of a fluke.

Renee was also unsure of her plans after high school. She expressed that she expected to get married and have children after graduating high school:

> When I was growing up, I really didn't think I was going to be anything other
>
> than a housewife.

In addition, Amanda, Beatrice, Janet Marie, JoAnn, and Renee describe some of their career experiences as being surprised that they got hired for jobs they were not qualified for. Renee was convinced that she obtained employment because of her looks:

> The jobs I got wasn't so much because of what I knew or my skills, but it was

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because I was very petite, pretty, sexy little girl. I always dressed real well

and would apply for jobs and smile, and I would get the job.

Christa's first job was in an office environment which led her to gain employment in careers

such as an administrative assistant, an office manager, a computer graphics designer, an

engineering tech, and a grant writer. She expressed:

I got my first job in an office doing administrative receptionist work for $10

an hour. They let me have it, I didn't know anything about computers, and I sat

down and trained with this girl who was leaving.

Amanda was a little more direct in communicating her surprise in getting hired for some of the

jobs she has had:

I knew that I enjoyed working with people and I enjoy helping people. And so

that made my decision for the several jobs that I would apply for. And how I got

these jobs I don't know because I didn't have an education.

Substance abuse. Two of the participants selected occupations that did not require much

effort due to continuously abusing substances early in their lives. Both participants conveyed

their concern about whether or not they had damaged their brain from all the substances they had

put in their body. JoAnn talked about how she experienced the world before she became sober:

I didn't use to pay too much attention to anything because I was always in my own

world. I mean before when I was doing drugs, I really wasn't aware, nobody really

worked. Nobody really cared about doing anything. Everybody I was around was

just living around mindless. So when I became sober, I started seeing people who

were productive. Going to work every day. So then I was like wow. And before that,

I didn't notice because when I would go to work, I would go hung over. So it wasn't a

big deal. I think that's why I picked jobs that weren't meaningful. It was just any old

job. You know, just kind of physical then get out of there. You know, there wasn't

too much effort. Just getting there was all was required.

Still searching. Two participants indicated that they were still searching for the career

that fulfills them. Their internal motivation to seek the optimum career continues to influence

their career decisions and enrollment into college. Rosa Linda stated:

I just feel that I have so much more to give, and I'm not operating at full potential

for myself.

Personality traits. Two participants believed it was important to select occupations

based upon their personality traits. Amanda realized that

from the beginning, because of my personality, I knew that I enjoyed working

with people, and I enjoy helping people. And so that made my decision for the

several jobs that I would apply for.

Christa described her personality traits in more detail and explained the importance of matching

her traits to her selected occupations:

I like being social and detail oriented and being good at what I like to do. Otherwise

it's not worth the money I'm making.

Survival mode. Six participants sought careers strictly to pay the bills or to help out the

family. Participants often entered careers based upon financial constraints. The independent

auditors both identified this sub-theme during the early stages of data explication. Following

further discussion with committee members, the researcher acknowledged her assumption that

many people select occupations based upon the need to pay bills. However, the auditors believed

this sub-theme was more descriptive of how these women made decisions to enter careers. For

instance, this led Charlene to go from job to job in search for higher pay:

> I would just get a job that would help pay my bills. I'm not going to stay at a $7
>
> an hour job and 3 months later I get a job offer for $9 an hour. I'm going to do
>
> what I need to pay my bills to survive. I mean, we were poor. We would sell at
>
> the flea market and sometimes, in our neighborhood when we had those big trash
>
> pick-ups, my mom would find out so we would go out there and we would pick
>
> stuff out to sell.

 Juliette gained employment at a place she thought she would never enter—a call center. She worried about how she was going to pay the bills after her divorce:

> my current choice is something that I said I would never do, but right now in
>
> my situation, I wouldn't want to work there too long, but it's something that I
>
> was finally able to find, It's working in a call center. My hours are working from
>
> 4-11p.m. Never in my entire life would I ever work in a call center or work
>
> evening or weekend hours. But through the divorce, work, and me going
>
> to school, this jobs helps me because I go to school during the day, and I work in
>
> the evening, I was in survival mode. A quick fix may hurt in the long run but this
>
> job helps me pay the bills.

Helping Others

Ten participants described their early career decisions to enter careers that involved helping others. Three participants wanted to help others because of their early familial responsibilities. Four participants wanted to prevent someone else from experiencing what they had experienced while growing up. While 5 other participants described their desire to help others because of their personal experiences and exposure to role models. For example, Beatrice

stated

> I wanted to be a teacher because I was the oldest of 9 [siblings] and play time
>
> was keeping them entertained to keep them in a straight line. I would have them
>
> call me teacher, and they would raise their hands and everything. I guess that's
>
> the reason I thought I was going to be a teacher. The people I admired the most
>
> were my teachers, so I assumed that one day that I was going to be teacher. I love
>
> to service people and talk to people, to help the community or whatever issues that
>
> came up.

Even though Beatrice's initial occupational choice was to become a teacher, she decided to enter

the field of Public Administration to assist groups of people through policy development. Four

of the participants' desire to help others stemmed from personal barriers, and they wanted to help

others to overcome similar obstacles. Reba said

> You know, going through with what I went through, I felt like I can be of
>
> more help when I can relate to someone else going through their issues and
>
> helping them through it. I want to help someone out of a bad situation.

Similar to the other participants, Rosa Linda wants to help prevent students from dropping out of

high school:

> I would like to be a judge or something in the political field to make some changes.
>
> And not so much change but some kind of implementation of programs to help.
>
> Because it's a cycle, I know why I dropped out of school, but if I can help someone
>
> identify that really early on so, a person can stay in school.

Advocacy and social justice career aspirations. Not only did many of these

participants want to help others, but they wanted to help them specifically by entering a legal

field. Amanda, Reba, Charlene, Nelda, Renee, and Rosa Linda all reported that they wanted to

be lawyers when they were growing up. However, many did not pursue these careers due to

comments made by their mothers. Rosa Linda remembered

> I always wanted to be an attorney. There was never any doubt. I've always
>
> known since I was 6 or 7. I've always been fighting the cause. For the longest time
>
> I wanted to get involved with civil rights and my mom would say don't go there,
>
> you'll get killed, and I would say, if that's what needs to happen then that's what needs
>
> to happen. If I need to die for a cause, so be it, I'm not afraid, but there's so much
>
> injustice that someone has to stand up for the underdog,

Renee was convinced by her mother not to enter a male-dominated career:

> As I got older in high school, I wanted to go to college. I thought of all kinds
>
> of possibilities. I thought of being a lawyer or a judge or something like that. I
>
> grew up in a neighborhood where people were always getting in trouble with
>
> the law. I remembered thinking I don't want to be on the side of getting into
>
> trouble. I want to be on the side of helping people out of trouble. To be an attorney,
>
> but what swayed me away from that was my mother. She would always tell me,
>
> "girls are not lawyers" you know, "girls are not judges."

Three of the six students' majors were Criminal Justice, Paralegal, and Pre-Law. The other

participants were majoring in social service fields.

Volunteerism

Another theme found from participant statements when describing their early career

experiencing was volunteer work. Volunteering provided 5 participants with skills, work

experience, and networking opportunities. However, because their work experiences were

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unpaid, many of the participants did not appear to recognize that the experience would help them

gain skills and eventually gain paid employment. Additionally, volunteer work seemed to be

encouraged by spouses because unpaid work experience provided the participants more freedom

to do household work and to be more available to take care of their children. For instance, Renee

said

> I really didn't work when I was married with my first husband because he
>
> didn't want me to work. So I did a lot of volunteer work. When I remarried,
>
> he [spouse] wanted me to be a wife and mother. My husband said, "why am I
>
> going to school when you need to take care of the family." So, anyway, I stayed
>
> married for about 7 years and I didn't work for a paying job, but I just did a lot
>
> of volunteer work or community work.

Volunteering also provided a way for participants to develop a social network while at the same

time being a part of their children's lives. Beatrice expressed that

> I liked the fellowship with so many women and sharing stories and doing
>
> volunteer work. So, I loved that, planning for fundraisers and things like that.
>
> [The company I worked for] really introduced me to volunteer work. So when
>
> I stopped working, and I stayed at home, I found out through my children's school
>
> that I could volunteer. So first it started because I liked keeping an eye out on my
>
> youngest, I wanted to be around him.

Religious Faith

Further analysis of participant statements revealed religious faith as a source of support

and courage to "push forward" through uncertain times in making career decisions. Five

participants made statements that reflected a sense of belief or faith in something higher than

themselves. Some participants sought a sense of direction while other participants sought faith for increased belief in them to perform a task. Rosa Linda did not consider herself to be a religious person; however, she remembers a church service that offered her a greater sense of awareness:

> I'm not a religious person. I am not. I know who my creator is. I know what he
> expects from me and to go to church. The pastor once took off his belt and gave
> it to two brothers. Okay 1 had all the baggage and the other didn't. He said go to the
> end of the church. The one with the baggage struggled, while the other [man] came
> and went, came and went. So I've learned that you got to let the negative stuff go,
> the negative people go, because they only weigh you down. I think it's a packaged
> deal, from your childbirth to present time. It forms who you are. So, I was looking
> for a job and through constant prayer, I asked the Lord, you know, tell me where I
> need to be.

JoAnn made similar comments in that she drew strength from God which in turn helped her believe in herself:

> I wanted to have a purpose for myself. Um, my pastor would always say that
> we all have a purpose and you know for the things we've gone through, and
> through God's glory. So I think religious faith has helped me push forward,
> you know. Making me believe that I could do it, and that I was worth it.

Resource Awareness and Acquisition

Another theme found in the participants' statements about their career decision-making experiences was related to not knowing how or where to ask for assistance. Three participants indicated that they did not have the connections or knowledge to navigate social, public, or

educational systems. Two participants indicated that they were not knowledgeable of the resources and support services available to them. Charlene suspected that

there has to be something out there. I just didn't know how to get it. I've never

had the luxury of knowing people [that could help] or having that connection.

Cuz growing up, my mother would always tell us we need to do things for

ourselves. You don't need to ask for help. So I guess that's kind of the way I am now.

Even today I'm a little apprehensive when asking for help.

Rosa Linda explained that people remain where they are at because of not knowing how to get started:

so a lot of people just stay there because they don't know how to read or write.

I feel like the barrio has good people they just don't know how to channel their

energies and intelligence. They haven't been taught. They have no clue how to

get started with college, I was there, I didn't know where to go to get started.

Amanda offered another reason why people do not receive help:

people don't have the means for help. They are not knowledgeable of resources

and assistance. Sometimes they are unsure of what questions to ask.

Familial Responsibility

Four of the participants, who all happen to be the eldest child, described their early career decision-making experiences as believing they had a responsibility to take care of their siblings or felt responsible to help out the family after their parents' divorce. Renee said

I needed to take care of my younger brother and sister. My mother worked nights,

and I took care of them when I got home from school. And, she just relied on me

to take care of the kids even though I was married.

Another participant, Rosa Linda, explained that she quit school at an early age to get a job:

> My mom was a single mother when I was growing up. She needed help so I
>
> went out to work. I quit school to get a job to help after my parents divorced. I
>
> quit at the age of 14. I worked in food services from the ages of 16, 17, and then
>
> the age of 18.

Minor Themes

This section describes minor themes that emerged from the research. These non-dominant themes reflect statements made by four or less participants. The themes addressed include gender role priorities, first generation college students, saying "no", and the media.

Gender Role Priorities

Three participants mentioned that taking care of the family was of high importance when making career decisions. In three cases, the husband, children, and immediate family would determine the participant's priorities in life. Beatrice stated culturally,

> your first priority is taking care of your husband, your children, and your house.

Juliette's stated similar priorities and made a suggestion to prevent that issue:

> when I met my other family members, careers never seemed to be a topic of
>
> discussion. It was always the husband, the children, the family. I mean, I was
>
> with an older man so I didn't have to think on my own. As I got older with him,
>
> I just didn't have to think on my own. With that, I guess I would say try not to be
>
> in a relationship that holds you back.

First Generation College Student

Four participants mentioned that they were the first in the family to complete high school or to attend college. Angel, Christa, and Renee mentioned that they would be the first person in

the family to graduate from high school. Angel reflected:

> I didn't know what I wanted to do, I just wanted to graduate. My mom would always
>
> tell me that if I did graduate, I would be the first one in the family to graduate high
>
> school.

Saying "No"

Another minor theme that emerged for two participants in describing their career

decision-making experience was the ability to say "no." One participant described feeling

uncomfortable when saying no. Her inability to say no prevented her from doing what she really

wanted to do, which was to quit a job under stressful situations. Beatrice explained that she

> got into it [a job] because of a youth program. The man I was working with was
>
> a really nice gentleman. He would take me to interviews, and a lot of times he
>
> would say I have this other job, and I guess really didn't know how to say no, so
>
> I went to the interviews. So I didn't really choose the job, and it was my first time
>
> at work so I needed to work. I could not say no, but they just said this is where I
>
> belonged, but later, I found out that I didn't know how to quit. I felt uncomfortable
>
> that I didn't know how to quit.

The other participant, Renee, conveyed that she was raised and taught to say yes. She entered a

marriage relationship by not having the ability to say no, even though she really did not want to

get married. Her inability to say no indirectly affected her career choices because her husband

did not permit her to go to college:

> When I got married, I knew right away that it was a mistake, and one of the
>
> reasons I got married, I think, was because I didn't know how to say no.
>
> This person is asking me this very serious question and wanted something

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very serious from me, and I was raised to say yes. And then while I was

married I wanted to go to school but my husband kept telling me that I didn't

need to go school.

Media

The two youngest participants of the sample indicated that the media was instrumental in

helping them make career decisions along with teaching them socialization skills. Nelda

watched Spanish soap operas to help her with socialization skills. She stated

My dream, dream, dream job is to be in a Spanish soap opera and to sing.

So, I like seeing them so I'll know how to act. TV helped me learn by watching.

I mean, I may think one thing but then if I watch in on TV you know, sometimes the

answer comes on the TV. I know it's not always good for me, but it does teach you

things. And I think also the magazines, too, because you may see something different

than what the TV says.

Janet Marie mentioned that the television and career software programs helped her become

aware of various career options:

Well the media, like Animal Planet and other shows. That really shaped me into

what I wanted to do, seeing things on TV. Then in high school there was a

partnership program to help, like a software program, you do the research that

would show you different careers that you're more compatible with and how much

jobs make and the educational requirements. That helped me a lot. That mainly

helped open my eyes in high school.

The following section provides emergent theme results to the second research question of

"What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as influential factors of their

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career decision-making processes? The themes under this next section represent the motivation for the participants to return to school.

<center>**Career Decision-Making Influences**</center>

Themes that emerged from the research relating to the second question were not as numerous as the themes emerging from the first question. However, the three themes that were uncovered relating to the factors that influenced the participants to return to school were (a) spouse or significant other priorities, (b) critical life-changing occurrences, and (c) participants' children.

Spouse or Significant Other

A theme that emerged from participant statements that delayed them from entering college was their spouse or significant other. Five of the participants stated that their spouses or significant others influenced them not to enter college or to quit attending college. Two of the participants below conveyed that the reason they were unable to attend college was because their significant others did not feel in control of the situation. Therefore, higher education was not supported. For instance, JoAnn decided to end a relationship with her significant other who did not support her returning to school. She reflected:

> I would say something like 'I want to go to school,' he was like, 'what, I don't have any control of that so you can't do it. You need to be here, making my food, cleaning my house, washing my clothes, and making sure I'm ready for work tomorrow.' But you know, taking care of the man was my job.

After her daughter's illness became terminal, she decided to get sober and attend college. Juliette similarly remembered that she was

> not encouraged for a career or education. I was already with an older man.

<center>73</center>

I didn't have to think on my own. I had a boyfriend who was jealous 'where are

you at, where have you been?' So I quit college [the first time]. But then again,

if you don't know, but I was so much focused into this one guy and having this

person telling me and controlling me and not really allowing me, you know,

because when you're with a person who's older, more controlling, and jealous,

it feels like your confined.

Although one of the reasons Beatrice decided to return to school was because her

husband was laid off of work, she conveyed some concern about how her husband was reacting

to her during her first semester in college:

This has been a sacrifice. I mean, my husband, there's been some conflict. But I

have to do this, at my age. And now, school is in me. I think he feels abandoned,

but I have not abandoned my household chores. I do dinner every day. I get the

dishes done and everything I need to do. Yes, it may take me a little longer in

cleaning. I try to organize myself at home and school. I know my children still

depend on me, so I try to schedule everything in. But now, I think my husband

feels left out.

Critical Life-changing Occurrences

Despite the resistance of the participant's spouse or significant other, a major theme that

emerged that influenced participants to make a career decision was in response to a critical life-

changing occurrence. Within this theme there were subthemes involving occurrences that

motivated participants to do something about their situations. The majority of these occurrences

often led participants to shift their thinking in that higher education was necessary to gain

employment, increase self-respect, and enhance employment opportunities. At the same time,

some participants' resilience abilities enabled them to adapt, move forward, and recover from their situations. Eight participants made a decision to attend or re-enter community college because something happened in their lives that made it necessary for them to make a change in their careers. Some of these occurrences influenced employment and life changes while other occurrences evoked personal motivations to pursue higher education. Juliette decided to return to school after being laid off after working 17 years in the mortgage field.

> It was basically me being in the mortgage business for so long, and the economy with the market the way it was, and still is, really caused the company to basically dissolve itself which left me without a job. So trying to find a job, it took me like 7 months. It was like forever. I realized that I need an education. Many of the jobs I was qualified for weren't even close to what I used to be making. Many job announcements required a Bachelor's degree. There were some that required an Associates. I made my decision to come back.

Angel decided to change careers after a critical incident occurred with her boyfriend. The same happened with JoAnn. When asked, "Regarding your current career choice, what do you think influenced your decision?" JoAnn expressed

> [What influenced my decision to make this choice was] the struggle I went through and the struggle I saw in the people who were around me. Because of my desire, I went through rehab. My desire to become sober came from way back when my daughter was diagnosed with a terminal condition. My mind was all over the place. I couldn't even finish a thought. And when I went into recovery, uh, I just could see myself doing this and helping others on drugs. I think it would help me to understand the cravings. I mean, you can read about it, but I don't think it's the same as someone who actually

went through it. Um, yeah, I really see myself doing that. Then it made me think that maybe I could go to school, you know? I mean, it was only two years, so I thought, why not?

Mistreatment. Within these critical life-changing occurrences, some participants experienced personal attacks or mistreatment from people in various workplaces that motivated them to pursue higher education. Reba stated that

it was a learning experience because I was faced with something like being treated in a disrespectful manner and someone brought it to my attention that you do have rights. It was being treated in a different way and knowing that I was being disrespected. I know I need to be an advocate which motivates me to help someone to know that it's not the way it should be. You know, going through with what I went through with my personal issues. I felt I could help others in that manner. Because it was something I could relate to and so I felt like I can be of more help when I can relate to someone else going through their issues and helping them through it. You know that became important to me.

Additionally, although Beatrice would always help others obtain public assistance; her own experience in applying for public assistance shed some light on her feelings

as I sat there I just started noticing the customer service to the clients. I started noticing the picture on the walls and how dirty the place was and how dirty the chair was that I was sitting in. It was depressing me. I heard them [employees] raising their voice to call attention. I thought maybe this is just something people get used and they just come. But I thought, there's no way that anybody can get used to something like this. So finally it was my turn for the interview, thank God

I got a nice lady. She started talking to me about job hunting, and I started sharing

with her how I felt about being there. I was telling her how it hurts how people get

treated when they ask for assistance and to get treated that way. But she said 'you

know what? You can do something about it. You can work for agencies like this.

Have you ever thought about going to school? I left that office that day, and I called this

gentleman and asked him, 'do you think school can be for me, something where I can

make a difference?'

Amanda shared a similar experience in being influenced to gain higher education after she felt

disrespected:

when I was going for my first divorce. I remember interviewing three to four different

attorneys. Some of them from the minute I walked in, I was treated at times,

disrespectful. And you know, just cuz you're an attorney, it's almost like they

were sitting on the desk but they're body came towards the desk and got really

in front of me in my face and said 'you know you can't have this and you have to

have this.' I thought if I was an attorney, that's not the way I would behave,

regardless of the individual who came in.

This occurrence motivated Amanda to pursue a career in criminal justice, specifically in law

practices.

Higher education perspective shifts. Five participants experienced critical occurrences

in their lives that motivated them to pursue higher education. Rosa Linda remembered thinking

after getting promoted was when I first realized how important education was

for me. I really think and in my heart, that education is the ticket out of where

I'm at. The ticket out. I just feel that I have so much more to give and I'm

not operating at full potential for myself. I know that having that piece of paper

means that I have perseverance. I have determination, and that's what's going

to take me where I want to be.

Renee realized that she did not want to work in manual-type occupations. She noticed that

a lot of people that work real hard do manual jobs, you know, people who clean

offices or hotels or houses. I mean my mother she worked real hard, but what

always influenced me is that people who work real hard doing manual jobs are

people who are not educated.

Resiliency. Despite these critical life-changing occurrences, 6 participants' ability to

adapt to these situations influenced them to return and remain in college in search of a better

standard of life. Renee stated

when it gets right down to it, the reason I came to college was so that I can have

a better standard of living. And that's why I keep going to college and even

though it's hard, it's because I do want a better standard of living.

Charlene also expressed that her trials and tribulations have made her who she is today. She

remarked

I just lived a really crazy life. But I don't regret it, because life takes you where

it takes you and sometimes you have to fall to be able to pick yourself up. And

I think some of the experiences that I have had made me realize like I need to

get off my butt and do something else or your life will be this way for the rest

of your life.

Participants' Children

Another theme that influenced participants to return to school was their own children.

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Six participant's children encouraged them to attend college. Some participants stated that they wanted to become self-sufficient and to be role models for their children. Rosa Linda's son encouraged her to continue education. He is also pursuing a career in the legal field. Angel has two daughters who are currently living with her at a homeless shelter. She stated

> I moved here to San Antonio to take care of me and my kids, without being dependent on anyone. School was the only thing on my mind, I mean, that's it, I have to get an education. I have to think of my girls.

Reba and Juliette expressed similar desires. Juliette stated

> I want to be role model for my children. I do not want her to be in my position. I do not want her to depend on any male for anything. I want her to be on top. She'll be able to take care of herself.

Self-efficacy Tenets

This section addresses the third research question: To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy theory substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? Self-efficacy is described as the belief individuals have about performing a particular task that leads to a specific goal, the expectations of which may be reached or changed through the aforementioned tenets (Bandura, 1986). Individuals may have low self-efficacy or high self-efficacy, depending upon the experience related to a specific task. If the experience was positive, a person's beliefs about accomplishing a task will be high or the person will be encouraged to pursue the task. If the experience was negative, then the expected outcome will be that of discouragement. Bandura's tenets will be addressed in turn.

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Vicarious Learning

Vicarious learning is described as seeing others be successful at doing a specific task (Bandura, 1977). Four participants explained that making the decision to attend college was less scary when they found out that there were other women under similar circumstances that were attending college and being successful. Nelda stated that she was

> initially scared to attend college. But her brother, with special needs went to
>
> college, so why not her? If my brother can do it, then why can't I?

Renee and JoAnn made similar statements about attending college. JoAnn stated

> when I started going to counseling and talking to other individuals regarding
>
> careers and people going to school, it kind of encouraged me, it inspired me.

Group work. Along the lines of observing others being successful performing tasks, participants conveyed that group interactions with other women under similar circumstance were instrumental in helping them make decisions and make changes to their lives. Five of the participants conveyed their preference for group counseling to learn various strategies and receive information. Being involved in groups during times of uncertainty and doubt helped some participants gain a sense of empowerment. During the interview, participants were asked, "Tell me about the types of learning experiences that helped you decide on and pursue your career choice? JoAnn responded with

> Groups, I attended a lot of groups. I attended group counseling at the rape crisis
>
> center. A lot of groups, also job readiness courses, stuff like that. Also at the
>
> battered women shelter we did a lot of groups in how to prepare yourself for a job
>
> and that kind of really empowered me. Then it made me think that maybe I could go
>
> to school, you know? So, yeah, it was the group classes that helped me.

Reba describes a similar experience pertaining to a need for group counseling:

> Um, I'm going to being exposed to a lot of group counseling and workshops. Um, just interacting with others, getting to know strangers, um you know? You go in being strangers and then finding out we're all going through the same thing yet we're all learning how to deal with our personal lives incorporating all that together overcoming personal struggles and keeping that goal.

Role models. Two participants mentioned that they had a role model when growing up who helped them decide which career direction they would pursue. However, five participants conveyed the importance of having someone to help them with career choices. They also spoke about the helpfulness of being exposed to professionals in their field of interests. For instance, when Amanda was asked, "What would you do to get help in making career choices?" She stated

> I would seek out as many people as possible, for example, like a counselor you feel really comfortable with. I would maybe ask individuals that I know are in the legal field. Tell me some of the pros and cons of that field. I have a criminal justice instructor here and he was a colonel in the AF and worked for the FBI when he got out. So I plan to keep in touch with him. So I hope that he could be my mentor. But I know that it's so busy right now, that I think it would be a wise to get at least three to four mentors.

Charlene provided some suggestions and mentor characteristic traits that she would prefer when receiving career services:

> But it's important for these mentors and counselors to develop personal relationships. I think would really help. Because then students would think that someone actually

cares about them and their well-being and their education. Because some of these

students don't have support at all. So I think it's important for the people to be able

to identify with these students like with their race or either gender or financial status to

kind of make it like an equal playing field. I mean, I may be wrong but that's something

that I think could help students; I thought it would be a good idea to get the views of the

Hispanic women and kind of put together what they may be going through

as compared to others and really look at factors that make them successful or what makes

them fail.

Six of the participants also wanted to help others by sharing their own experiences with women

under similar circumstances. In essence, they wished to be someone's role model. Angel stated

that

there's other people who are older than me who like what I do; so I put up flyers at the

shelter to offer help with typing or on Microsoft Word, anything I know I can help other

people with. I just want them to know that they're not on their own and that other people

are going through it.

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion is a similar to observational learning in that a person's belief will

increase or decrease depending upon hearing about someone else's positive or negative

experience concerning a specific phenomenon. This is described by someone or something

persuading or dissuading an individual to perform a task. Themes that emerged under this tenet

were encouragement and discouragement to pursue a task.

Encouragement. Six participants were encouraged by someone else's belief in the

them to accomplish the task. Renee offered a detailed recollection:

the counselor I was talking to said 'well then that's just what we're going to do, we're going to make your dreams come true' and she started writing things about the paralegal program and showing me things. I was sitting there just amazed, and she said, 'yeah, you can do that' and it just took those simple words for me to hear. I'm like yeah, I can do that, but I wasn't really thinking I can do that, I mean I wanted to but in my head I just couldn't conceptualize that I could do that until someone told me. And I left here thinking, I can do this, telling myself I can do that. You know, and it still amazes me that I am doing it.

Three other participants explained how their siblings, directly and indirectly, inspired them to go to college. Juliette remembered that her

sister's the one who really helped. She kind of gave me some direction when she asked me, what do you want to do for yourself? [I replied] I don't know. She would say, you know you only live once, you have to be happy, you have to do what you want to be.

Charlene and Renee both felt they needed to set an example for their younger siblings. Charlene stated

so there was a lot of pressure on me to succeed. I mean, I had to be perfect. I had a younger brother and sister, and I had to set the example and um, they looked up to me. So, things that normal kids did, I didn't do. Because I didn't want them to look at me and say well if Charlene's going to do that then I'm going to do that and then they're going to fail because I failed. And I didn't want that burden on me.

Discouragement. Three participants stated that teachers indirectly discouraged them from attending college. Charlene mentioned that she was

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mocked by a teacher for not knowing something. College was not mentioned until I

went to high school.

Customer service treatment. Six participants communicated that workers providing

general services could either encourage or discourage them. For example, Amanda conveyed

it's people in the front who should really make the huge impact when you walk in.

These people have to be genuine. When they smile, they're not just smiling because

they're supposed to smile. And you can tell when it's not genuine; they're just doing

 it like a script. It needs to come from the bottom of their heart. Um, they need to

really zero in. I mean I know we are in a really fast paced world right now, but it

really just takes a few minutes to find out what that person needs. Genuine. Also,

the people working there need to be experienced, and educated, and have the

resources to know where to send them.

Beatrice, Renee, Reba, Christa, and Juliette stated similar customer service qualities. Juliette

seemed more concerned about the worker's personality traits than the service they could provide.

Juliette expressed that

I'm thinking more of the person's qualities who provides this service. I'm thinking

they should be honest in giving correct information, but basically helping us about

the choices out there and giving some guidance. That someone could give us options

about what's out there. I would hope that the services I would be getting would be

from someone who is totally honest of what you're going to get.

Respect. Rosa Linda, Amanda, Reba, and Beatrice also alluded to the importance of

reading non-verbal communication especially when they were asking for help. Rosa Linda felt

disrespected by a worker at a community college department. She talked about how her age,

race, and her education along with how the worker delivered the service were factors that made her feel disrespected because of a worker's body language. She stated

> I go to the philosophy department, I meet a witch. She was talking to me like "well we're already full." I was thinking, lady do you think you're talking to an 18 year old? I'm the same age as you, don't be talking to me like that just because you may have an education and don't you talk to me like that because you're a White woman and I'm a Hispanic woman. So you need to stop that disrespect right there and she had an attitude "well we're already full." I could see it in her face.

Rosa Linda left the department discouraged about returning to college, but before leaving, she turned to a source of strength:

> I didn't know what to do. I was already going home. I turned my body physically to go home. I said to myself that this is way too much trouble. I'm going home. Then I said NO I'm not going home at this point, I said "Lord, it's in your hands if it's meant for me to go to school you're going to open every door I need to be open for me, because I don't have the money, I don't have the money for books, I don't have a computer but I'm here, and I want to learn I want to learn and I want to get a degree." When I walked into her [Counselor] office and she said, 'how can she help?' With her positive attitude and everything, I thought, you know what, this woman makes up for that woman over there.

Reba expanded on how non-verbal communication work determined whether or not she felt respected:

> You know like I'm very cautious, and I don't look at people, I mean I study people right a way that's just something that I do. I observe them like their body language,

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their tone of voice, you know, I just study them. I would watch how everyone treats

each other, uh that's important to me with respect.

Performance Accomplishments

Bandura (1977) describes performance accomplishment as the most impactful source of

increasing or decreasing belief in oneself. Success in the individual's ability to perform a task

increases self-efficacy, while failure to perform a task, tends to lower self-efficacy. Angel

illustrates this concept while living in a homeless shelter. She noticed that

the more I started doing, the better I started feeling.

Four other participants indicated that earning and maintaining a high grade point average was a

way they could gauge their success in college. Rosa Linda expressed

It's going to give me a sense of confidence that yes I can and that's why to me my

GPA is so important to me because I don't want to be just another 'Jane Martinez'

instead of 'Jane Doe' I don't want to be another just another average American.

Amanda adds that

the most important thing I need to do is to be a good student and earn a good

grade point so that I can continue on to the next level. I could get into a university

with a 2.0, but if I pursue law school, I would need at least a 3.2.

Physical and cognitive challenges.   Earning and maintaining their grade point averages

is one way the participants gauged their success. However, six participants described how their

age and physical and cognitive abilities presented them with some challenges during their first

semester back to school. Renee stated that

it's real hard to continue going to college at my age. There's so many obstacles. One

of the reasons why old people shouldn't go to school is because they can't carry their

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books. I mean my books are extremely heavy. Also, I have a lot of health issues that a lot of younger students don't have. I have a heart condition, and sometimes, just coming to school everyday, I feel real tired. And I didn't have that as a younger student, even just walking to one end of the campus to the other, sometimes I get out of breath, and I didn't think about that when I was scheduling my classes.

Rosa Linda, Amanda, Reba, JoAnn, Juliette, and Angel revealed that they had doubts in their ability to learn the material needed to be successful in college. Amanda expressed uncertainty about her academic skill set. Some of the other participants mentioned that they realized that they needed more reading time to comprehend ideas. JoAnn and Reba experienced self-doubt about whether or not they could remember or learn new material as a consequence of previous substance abuse issues. JoAnn vividly remembers that

> initially, I didn't think I could do anything. I was nervous. Even the first day of class I got here really early from the bus. I even almost started crying. Because I thought, can I really do this? Can I do it? I know I have the will but do I have the ability? I hadn't been to school in a long, long time. Would I be able to retain anything? And I can't, sometimes I read a chapter and it doesn't stay, but um we got our grades yesterday and I was the third highest in the class. So yeah, I was really unsure of myself when I started. I really didn't have any confidence at all. I really don't have anyone I can go to ask questions. I mean no one else in our family went to college. My mother didn't graduate from High School. So, I was really afraid and unsure.

Emotional Arousal

Bandura (1977) describes this tenet by which people who expect to experience fear from

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performing a specific task may be decreased by incorporating a reduction of tension via anxiety management techniques, such as visual imagery, relaxation training, self-talk, and journal writing that relates to positive or negative career behaviors. Although many of the participants communicated that group-work has been helpful to their development, only one participant, Angel, specifically indicated that she learned positive self-talk from a group workshop at the shelter:

> I have to talk my way through, you know. Like I'm learning how to do that, talking
>
> through stuff because sometimes I feel myself wanting to go back to the old ways,
>
> like wanting to drink and party. I have to think of my girls, and I don't want them to
>
> have to go through this.

One-to-one counseling. Along the lines of emotional arousal strategies, not only did a few participants articulate the helpfulness of group interactions, but many participants communicated the desire to have one-to-one counseling services available. Rosa Linda, Reba, Janet Marie, and Angel, each conveyed the idea of wanting or needing clinical counseling services. However, Angel was concerned that a counselor who had her same experiences could help her through her emotional problems, she stated:

> I feel like no one can help me with certain stuff, like emotional stuff. I feel like
>
> counselors there can't really help you unless they've been there, like the case workers.
>
> My caseworker is like my mom, like, I like her, but then I don't like her because she
>
> gets disappointed in me. So I don't always tell her everything because then she's
>
> going to 'rag' on me. I normally don't like going to her, cuz, she's like my mom,
>
> so I don't want to tell her.

Janet Marie echoed similar statements about wanting counseling services that would help her to

handle situations:

> I would want counselors that would be aware that part of their job is to help with
> emotional or other issues not just academic, like ways to help people handle
> situations. That would be my main thing.

Ethnic and gender preferences. Beatrice, Charlene, and Rosa Linda, conveyed that
they felt better when receiving services or assistance by people of their own ethnic background
and gender. Beatrice often sought out professors of similar ethnic background and age. She
stated

> I'll be honest with you, I just don't want any roadblocks in the way, so I purposely
> look for professors with a Hispanic name because I relate better with them. So
> when I talk to other students, I ask them about the teachers, and especially the
> Hispanic teachers, especially someone my age, older.

Charlene also made similar statements:

> I requested to speak to a Hispanic counselor. Not because I'm racist or prejudice
> or anything, but just because I thought they would be able to relate better to me or
> identify better with where I'm coming from, you know with the same ethnic
> background, preferably female.

Conclusions

In summary, the participants of this study described how they came to think, feel, and
believe about certain occupational choices and career decisions. Many participants emphasized
that group work, support, resources, and being exposed to other women under similar
circumstances helped them to pursue endeavors that they were once fearful of and helped them
survive times of adversity. Critical life occurrences were often the catalysts for many of these

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participants to re-enter school. Participants described several ways of how Bandura's self-efficacy tenets contributed to them increasing their belief in accomplishing career-related tasks.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the career experiences and perspectives of Mexican American community college women who are 25 years of age and older. A phenomenological approach was employed to understand the essence of Mexican American re-entry woman's career decision-making processes by exploring the details about how 12 participants perceived their career experiences.

More than half of the 12 participants were single parents who earned less than $20,000 per year. Each participant answered 15 semi-structured interview questions that were guided by three research questions: (a) How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences, (b) What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes, and (c) To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy beliefs substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? Participant responses to the interview questions provided findings that supported previous career investigations and added new findings to the career literature. This chapter discusses study results, limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Research Question 1: How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences? Each participant provided descriptions of her early career decision-making experiences. Within the descriptions, seven themes were uncovered: Parental Messages, Spontaneous Career Paths, Helping Others, Volunteerism, Religious Faith, Resource Awareness and Acquisition, and Familial Responsibility. In addition, four minor

themes emerged: Gender Role Priorities, First Generation, Saying 'No', and Media.

Findings supported previous career research relating to ethnic minority women in that the messages received from their parents did influence their early career choices (Garza, 1998). For example, Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) suggested that among other factors, academic degree expectations and encouragement by parents significantly influenced the career choices of Mexican American college students. More specifically, mothers of Mexican American students often swayed the student toward or away from pursuing specific occupational choices (Flores & Obasi, 2005; Garza, 1998). In addition to reflecting findings from previous career literature, the current study revealed that many participants did not receive communication about careers or career aspirations from their parents.

Findings also showed that many of the participants entered careers without planning them. Magnuson, Wilcoxon, and Norem (2003) demonstrated how a happenstance approach to career choice could be beneficial to finding rewarding career paths by illuminating the qualities of individuals entering jobs by chance (i.e., open to opportunities, risk-taking, and enjoyment of learning). Some participants explained that while they entered careers on a whim, they conveyed the importance of selecting careers according to their personality traits, their interests in helping others, their skills, and their values (i.e., higher wages or entering jobs for personal satisfaction). These findings are in agreement with the current study, which revealed that many of the participants did not know how to implement or make decisions about a career of interest. Consequently, this may have led many participants to enter unplanned career paths.

In relation to entering unplanned careers, participants selected occupations based upon their personalities and interest areas. It was interesting to note that the majority of these participants reported high interests for working in social-service careers. This coincides with

studies that show women scoring significantly higher in the social interest areas (Trusty, Ng, & Ray, 2000).

While nominal career literature illustrates the benefits of volunteer experiences for Mexican American re-entry women, the current study provided examples of how volunteer experiences influenced participants' career development processes. Volunteer experiences provided participants an opportunity to network with other people, specifically, other women. This created a social support network in that women often shared information and resources. Previous career literature has not recognized the benefits of volunteerism and how these experiences could enhance opportunities in career decision making, specifically for this sample.

Within the past 10 years, career literature has paid little attention to the role of spirituality and religion in career development, this study revealed religious faith to be a factor in this sample's career decision making. Although Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, and Lewis-Cole's (2006) study consisted of a different sample, their study supported this finding in that religious faith helped college students cope with various career and life challenges. Similarly, Royce-Davis and Stewart (2000) found that believing in a higher power was illustrated as a personal attitude to how students made career decisions. In this current study, the role of religious faith was used as a source of support and courage during times of uncertainty. This reflects Duffy and Blustein's (2005) investigation in that religious faith frameworks were found to be connected to undergraduate students' confidence in their ability to perform tasks associated with careers.

Findings confirmed previous career research in that the lack of resource and information awareness could be predictive of the career choices selected by Mexican American college students. Caldera et al.'s (2003) study revealed that Mexican American students may not have

the resources accessible to them in order to make informed career decisions. In essence, this lack of information and resources could impact an individual's career development processes such as career exploration, commitment, and early dismissal of career aspirations (Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005), financial constraints (Rivera et al., 2007; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006), and inadequate high school-to-college preparation (Vela-Gude et al., 2009). The current study showed how the lack of parental messages, information, and resource knowledge could impact an individual's awareness about how to access assistance pertaining to career choices.

Lack of information and resource acquisition was related to another finding in that first generation Mexican American college students may not have sufficient assistance in navigating the college system due to the limited college experiences of their parents and insufficient help from school counselors (Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006). Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, and Ruder (2006) also suggested that first-generation Latino/Latina students may be reluctant to trust individuals of authority. In addition, Leal-Muniz and Constantine (2005) expressed that lack of information and exposure to various career choices could limit Mexican American college students in pursuit and exploration of unfamiliar careers.

Although, there are limited findings of Mexican American college women's academic pursuits and career motivations, this study revealed that the uncertainty in attending college may have stemmed from familial responsibilities. This sample experienced some opposition from their parents, which in turn affected their early career decisions as it was necessary for them to help maintain the household. Some of the participants were responsible for taking care of their siblings, or had to help pay the bills; therefore, they did not attend college or school. Wycoff's (1996) study revealed similar results in that women who did experience conflict within the family, were more apt to attend college in the same town or close to home.

Research Question 2: What do Mexican American re-entry, college women perceive as influential factors of their career decision-making processes? The themes that emerged in response to the aforementioned questions were Spouse or Significant Other, Critical life-changing Occurrences, and Participants' Children. There is limited research in the area of spouse or significant other support influencing Mexican American college women to pursue higher education. However, existing literature portrays Hispanic college women to "live narrowly defined roles" (Garza, 1998, p. 121). Findings from this examination revealed conflict with family and household responsibilities and negative spousal or significant other support which in turn influenced the participants' career decisions. Bova and Phillips (1989) demonstrated a similar finding for women in that study who indicated that their priorities in life involved tending to others before themselves.

Collectively, women in this study revealed that a life-changing event had influenced their decision to return to college. These findings support results by Fisher and Padmawidjaja's (1999) examination in that critical life-changing occurrences directly and indirectly impacted a college student's career path. Similar to this current study, Fisher and Padmawidjaja's participants were motivated to enter career paths in the legal and social-service fields to help others, primarily after something had happened to an immediate or extended family member. Additionally, this study sample's attitude of resilience helped these participants deal with critical life-changing occurrences. Consistent with Kinsel's (2005) study, participants in this current study adapted to situations as they happened, all with the desire to attain a better standard of living. A resilient attitude was an approach these participants used to persevere in times of adversity.

The findings of this study revealed a positive influence of children encouraging some of

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the participants to attend college. However, this was contradictory to previous literature concerning children's influence on educational pursuits of nontraditional students. Reay (2003) explained that the working class women in her study handled guilt feelings by telling themselves that attending college showed their children that the hardship was worth it, and that they often saw themselves as role models to their children. In contrast, Taniguchi and Kaufman's (2005) investigation of educational pursuits among nontraditional college students revealed that the completion degree rate is impinged on when women have children because of the demands associated with raising children such as financial limitations, emotional needs, and energy requirements. However, a more recent study of nontraditional female college students reported that raising children contributed to a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction for being able to manage multiple life stressors (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Many of the participants in this study indicated that their children, directly and indirectly, motivated them to attend college and to remain in college for the sake of their children's future.

Research Question 3: To what extent are Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy beliefs substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women? This study revealed several findings that corresponded to all of Bandura's tenets: Group Work, Role Models, Encouragement, Discouragement, Customer Service Treatment, Respect, Physical and Cognitive Challenges, One-to-one Counseling, and Ethnic and Gender Preferences. For instance, under the vicarious learning tenet (i.e., seeing others be successful at a task), several participants reported that group interactions with other women in similar circumstance were instrumental in helping them make decisions or changes to their lives. These findings support Sullivan and Mahalik's (2002) study

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in that the authors successfully demonstrated how an all-women career group incorporating Bandura's tenets helped to increase the sample's career decision-making self-efficacy, career exploration, and commitment to pursuing specific career options. Additionally, having a role model provided participants with someone they can look up to. Moreover, many of the participants wished to inspire others the way they had been inspired. Cardoza (1991) emphasized that Hispanic women who had role models were more apt to remain in college and complete their degree once they decided to enter college.

The findings uncovered under the verbal persuasion tenet revealed relational perspectives. This tenet is depicted as person's belief in accomplishing a goal by being influenced positively or negatively after hearing or seeing someone else's experience concerning a specific phenomenon. This is described as someone or something persuading or dissuading an individual to perform a task. The findings, similar to that of Schultheiss, Palma, Predrgovich, and Glasscock's (2002) study, found that family members either limited or enhanced these participants' feelings or experiences about a certain phenomenon.

Relevant to the above finding, Rees, Luzzo, Gridley, and Doyle's (2007) demonstrated how a woman's desire to connect with one another could be an underlying factor to her career decision-making processes. This study's participants demonstrated how their thoughts, actions, and feelings were affected as a consequence of another person's action or reaction. Their desire for positive customer service and helping skills evoked a sense of self-respect for these participants, which influenced their encouragement or discouragement to perform a task. Some of the participants commented that they were never encouraged to pursue higher education by their teachers.

Also, while some literature supports a no preference stance for cultural similarities by

clients toward helpers (Elstad, 1994), a couple of studies indicated a slight preference for female counselors (Pikus & Heavey, 1996) and a preference for a counselor of the same race (Speight & Vera, 2005). However, this current study revealed similar findings to Duncan and Johnson's (2007) study of ethnic minority college students. Duncan and Johnson found student preference for receiving assistance from someone of a similar sex, culture, and class. In this study, some participants preferred being helped by a female, with a second preference to being helped by someone of a similar race, followed by someone who was similar to the age of the participant.

A surprising finding that influenced the success or failure of an individual's ability to perform a task (i.e., performance accomplishment tenet), involved physical and cognitive challenges of older college students. Participants of this study revealed that their physical limitations, such as foot problems and diabetic issues, might prevent them from successfully completing their coursework (i.e., lack of concentration and physical pain). Some participants mentioned that given their older ages, carrying numerous books to buildings across the other side of the campus was challenging. They mentioned that they tended to be slower in walking and getting across campus. At this particular community college, classes are only 10 minutes apart. As a result, participants revealed the difficulty they had in walking from one side of the campus to the other in a limited time frame. Additionally, findings revealed the need for tutors since this sample had not attended a school setting in some time.

Finally, there were not many responses relating to Bandura's emotional arousal tenet. This tenet provides strategies that help individuals cope with events that arouse emotions such as anxiety, anger, or depression. For instance, this study revealed that learning how to self-talk was an effective way for a participant to counter negative behaviors in response to emotions and feelings. Nonetheless, another finding of this study demonstrated that many of the participants

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desired one-to-one counseling to help with clinical and emotional issues.

Limitations

While this study revealed valuable information about the career experiences of Mexican American community college re-entry women, there were potential limitations. One such limitation of this study could exist in that 6 of the 12 participants had nominal interaction (i.e., back-to-school advisement) with the researcher prior to the data collection interview, due to the researcher's employment at the nontraditional student center. On the one hand, this may be considered a source of strength in that the participant-to-researcher rapport and trust were already established. On the other hand, the participants may not have reported their true thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Lastly, two participants were related to one another. A mother and daughter participated in this study; however, due to the daughter's schedule, she was unable to participate until three weeks after her mother was interviewed. The mother could have shared the questions with her daughter. As a result, the daughter could have planned for and may have responded differently based upon previous knowledge of the questions.

Implications for Counselors

Educating students early on about a career planning process, preferably before the high school years, is essential for learning effective career decision-making skills. Age-appropriate career awareness is also necessary. It is important that students are introduced to and exposed to several occupational options while they are forming ideas about the world. In addition to learning about career options, financial assistance, and education and training, other options should also be presented. Showing students how to make informed decisions about selecting career paths (i.e., labor market trends, employer expectations, educational requirements, pay,

etc.) may also be important during their formative years. It may be beneficial to discuss scenarios about future careers and their potential roles in these careers or current world situations.

This study lends support to multicultural counselor awareness and to various counseling approaches for career planning and development such as social cognitive career theory, Bandura's self-efficacy tenets, and relational approaches. Since the early career development approaches (i.e., trait-factor) to choosing occupations evolved, continued research and career instruments enhanced the career counseling process in efforts to simplify career decision-making processes. While career decision making and career transitions are common experiences throughout an individual's life span, they are rarely simple. Therefore, an increased understanding about the intricate process of career counseling is essential to adult learning. Individuals often seek counselor assistance: to figure out "what's wrong with them;" to find answers that alleviate their distress; to help them change their life circumstances; or to provide strategies that help them change something in their lives. Whether the request is to assist with decision making, goal setting, clarifying, adjustment, or to help with emotional or clinical issues, facilitating a process of self understanding and providing problem solving strategies are crucial to an individual's counseling process. It may be beneficial to facilitate a process that informs students of how previous and current career decisions have and may impact future career options and life situations.

This study also revealed that there may be some generational differences concerning career expectations and development for women of Mexican descent. On the one hand, older participants stated they had family responsibilities at an early age (i.e., Rosa Linda quitting high school to work at 14 years of age to help recently divorced mother). It is important to ask all

women about their early career decision-making experiences. This type of inquiry could elicit career assumptions and potential barriers in career selection. On the other hand, the younger participants made reference to the media and publications as important means toward helping them make career decisions or to become informed about various career opportunities. It may be helpful for counselors to develop or distribute career-related materials utilizing various media, publications, and technological methods.

Furthermore, traditional ways of assisting college students may not be beneficial to the nontraditional college student. Counselors should not assume students know which questions to ask or what terminology to use when seeking information. Step-by-step guidance, information, and support could be extremely helpful for the retention of nontraditional students. This study demonstrated several findings of how these Mexican American re-entry community college women perceived their career decision-making experiences to influence their choices to enter or not enter college or to change or not change careers. Either way, the approaches suggested for the provision of enhanced career planning and development assistance to nontraditional student populations will be discussed in turn: Initial Career Counseling Meeting, the Career Counseling Process, Self and Career Awareness, Counseling and Clinical Skills, and Career Counseling Strategies and Services.

Initial Career Counseling Meeting

Upon examining this study's findings, a closer look at intake sessions was recognized as essential. Quimby and O'Brien (2004) suggest focusing on factors that influence the career decisions of nontraditional college women. In the current study, many participants described the need to be respected and cared for as an individual. Since each person is unique, it is imperative that counselors establish an effective student-counselor relationship. This may be established by

building rapport and trust, providing a safe and comfortable environment, demonstrating respect, and establishing a personal connection with the student early in the counseling process. Many participants mentioned the importance of being able to relate to the helping practitioner; therefore, it may be advantageous for counselors to share their own career journeys. It may be helpful to ask non-traditional students about their early memories of career decision making, and then be sure to take the time to actively listen to their responses. Setting aside at least an hour for every counseling session, so as not to hurry the process, would also be beneficial to both the client and counselor. These strategies may demonstrate supplemental care for the student and the process.

The Career Counseling Process

Findings from this study indicated that students may not know what questions to ask relating to academic needs or career options. It may be beneficial to inform students how career counseling may help them in making informed decisions. It may be important to explain what career counseling is and is not. It is important to show how self- and career-understanding may lead to informed decision making. Career counseling may be described as an organized way of researching careers based upon varying personal aspects. It could be beneficial to explain that sessions may include exploration of areas such as: family background, personal characteristics, decision-making history, intellectual abilities, work limitations, natural talents, interests, values, past and perceived barriers, occupational experiences, labor market trends, company research, decision making, goal setting, and taking action. It may be necessary to revisit the above areas again throughout the career decision-making process. This corresponds with Mihal et al. (1984) approach to career decision making. For instance, individuals may be functioning in several stages simultaneously and at differing intervals across the life span. Part of explaining the career

counseling process may involve an explanation of how the aforementioned areas may be currently influencing individual career decision making.

Self and Career Awareness

Many of the women in this study had desires to pursue traditional, female-dominated careers in the social service field as influenced by their parents and life circumstances. Since this sample tended to select careers based upon what others suggested, it may be beneficial for counselors to encourage exploration of their career assumptions along with an examination of perceived barriers relating to specific careers. It could be beneficial to promote self-understanding and reflection along with providing information about the labor market and occupations which will in turn help women make informed decisions about careers. It is also important to provide students with concrete options and solutions to overcome their barriers. Inquiring as to what the student is willing or not willing to do to overcome various barriers is important, as well.

This study illustrated that there may be a perception that individuals should know what type of career to enter upon graduating high school; therefore, it may be helpful for counselors to inform students that an individual will more than likely enter 5-7 different careers in her or his life time; this may include changing occupations, career fields, or employers (Mullins, 2009). This may reduce the stress to make an ultimate career choice. Also, some individuals may be in a hurry to make a decision because they have waited so long to make a decision, attend college, or because they may feel old. It may be helpful for the practitioner to put in perspective how many more years that individual plans to work. For instance, pursuing a desired career, whether it takes two, four, or more years doing what they really enjoy would be worth it, like making an investment toward life satisfaction.

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Counseling and Clinical Skills

The data from this study revealed that there is a desire for one-to-one clinical counseling services to be available at a community college. Many issues may come up during the career decision-making processes (i.e., depression, grief, sexual and substance abuse, suicidal ideation, homelessness); and if a counselor is not trained in these areas, the counselor will need to make appropriate referrals (Evans & Larrabee, 2002). It may be helpful for practitioners to continually research community resources and become involved with community network agencies. It may also be advantageous to invite counselors from the community to facilitate groups or workshops in areas relating to stress, anxiety, guilt, depression, and other sensitive, transitional matters.

This area has implications for counselor education programs, as well. Counselors new to the career counseling field could benefit from learning applications that are not solely focused on jobs and instrument results. This could be demonstrated with the infusion of counseling-core content areas such as group work, multiculturalism, and theories in their beginning career development class. Master and doctoral level students, for example, might benefit from an advanced-level career class as they continue to develop a full spectrum of the career counseling process.

Career Counseling Strategies and Services

Some participants conveyed anxiety and uncertainty prior to and while returning to college; therefore, it may be helpful to point out how their previous experiences, family and work, paid or unpaid, could help them in classroom environment. For instance, managing their time, working long hours, planning, and multitasking could be extremely helpful in being successful in college. It may be helpful to point out the positive attributes these students bring to college and to also discuss potential obstacles. It would be beneficial if the student left the

counselor's office with a variety of available resources on and off campus such as tutor assistance, one-to-one counseling resources, community and health resources, childcare resources, financial assistance and scholarship information to name a few.

The participants in this study conveyed that being encouraged by others was helpful to their career decision making. As such, it might also be helpful for counselors to develop strategies that utilize career groups with recognition opportunities; possibly an all-women group where participants may be experiencing similar hardships. Also, it may be helpful to incorporate role-play scenarios where students practice discussions with significant others, children, and extended family members in how family dynamics may change (i.e., dividing household chores, meals, etc.) when attending college. These strategies may help mitigate potential obstacles these participants may face when dealing with multiple and conflicting roles. In addition, these groups and role-play experiences may provide students with encouragement opportunities to share with others about methods that may work to ease family, college, and life situations.

Counselors may also consider holding career exploration and information sessions and group workshops prior to the student making a decision to enroll into college; for instance, topics such as balancing multiple roles, career challenges, physical health issues, childcare assistance, scholarship opportunities, and problem solving could be offered in the group. In reflecting on Bandura's self efficacy work and this current study, it may be helpful to also include motivational guest speakers of similar sex and circumstance(s) to these workshops. For example, current students or recent graduates who experienced similar obstacles may be of benefit to future students. This networking opportunity provides students with vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and performance accomplishment opportunities along with providing students with potential peers experiencing similar obstacles; thereby, they could share

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resources and solutions to problem areas.

It may also be helpful for counselors to establish an advisory committee involving members from the community, the college, companies, and current nontraditional students to continuously monitor, maintain, and increase awareness of potential needs for nontraditional student populations. Volunteer experience was prominent in this sample of Mexican American re-entry community college women. It could be beneficial if counselors considered advocating for volunteer experience to count as college credit once these nontraditional students enter college.

Future Research

This phenomenological exploration provided new findings to the career literature pertaining to Mexican American re-entry community college women. This qualitative approach provided the freedom to openly explore the intrinsic needs of this sample. Future qualitative research on a potential link between career planning and development with college recruitment and retention efforts of similar or other ethnic minority college women may be warranted to assist this population to enter and remain in college. Future studies may also explore the career decision making and career intervention needs for women and men of diverse backgrounds in efforts to expand current knowledge in this area.

Relevant to the above suggestion in enhancing career development practices, popular career assessments may use terminology and career behaviors that may be unfamiliar or may not seem relevant to nontraditional student populations. It may be helpful to explore constructs, terminology, and career behaviors associated with nontraditional students in order to develop culturally sensitive career instruments.

Summary

This phenomenological study explored the career experiences of 12 Mexican American, re-entry women who were attending a southern Texas community college. Each participant answered 15 semi-structured interview questions that led to a discussion of 21 emergent themes pertaining to career decision-making influences and career intervention strategies.

Results of this study suggested that a traditional way of assisting college students may not be beneficial to the nontraditional college student. Implications for counselors and counseling programs were shared to enhance the career counseling process of nontraditional student populations. Future research opportunities were also suggested to further the knowledge in this area.

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH AS A HUMAN SUBJECT
The University of Texas at San Antonio

**Exploring Career Decision-Making Experiences of
Mexican American Re-entry Community College Women**

Principal Investigator(s): C. Sophia Dominguez, M.A., LPC-I

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. You will also receive a copy of this form to keep for your reference. The Principal Investigator or his/her representative will provide you with any additional information that may be needed and answer any questions you may have. Read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before you decide whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Funding Source: Not applicable

What is the purpose of the study? We are asking you to take part in a study that explores the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American college women returning to school after some time has passed. We want to learn about how your experiences and outlook of life may have led you to your career choices. We are asking you to take part in this study, because you are a women student currently enrolled at SAC of Mexican American descent who is over the age of 24. Up to fifteen women are expected to take part in this study during the Spring of 2009.

What will be done if you agree to take part in this research study? If you are willing to participate in the study I will schedule an interview that will last about an hour and a half. The interview will involve questions about the career decision-making experiences that may have led you to enter or re-enter college. The interview will take place at SAC or the UTSA downtown campus. I will record the interview; then, either I or a professional transcriptionist will listen to the tapes and type all your responses onto a computer. Approximately two weeks after the interview, I will contact you to request another meeting to ask that you make sure the interview notes match what you said during the interview.

What are the possible discomforts and risks? While every effort will be taken to assure your privacy and confidentiality, there may be possible risks associated with this study. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected in the following ways: (a) all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet or drawer; (b) audiotapes from the interviews will be listened to and typed up by me or a professional. I will then erase the tapes after I present my study to UTSA professors; and (c) no individual names will be linked with the data; as a name other than yours [pseudonym] will be used. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer.

What are the possible benefits to taking part in this research?   No benefit exists at this time.

Will there be any costs related to the research? No

Will there be any compensation for participation? You will receive a $25.00 HEB gift certificate in appreciation of your involvement in the study approximately two weeks after the career interview during the follow-up interview.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you? Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time. Your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at San Antonio or San Antonio College.

If you wish to receive career counseling, you will be provided with information from the SAC career planning center to receive career-related assistance.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected? Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. Your records may be viewed by UTSA's Institutional Review Board, but the confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The data resulting from your participation may be used in publications and/or presentations, but your identity will not be disclosed.

If you volunteer to be included in an interview, it will be audio taped. There will be no personal identification information on the audiotapes, and all audio tapes will be kept in a secure, locked cabinet located in a UTSA office. The recordings will be heard only for research purposes by me, my faculty advisors, and by UTSA's Institutional Review Board if necessary for oversight purposes. I will erase the tapes after I present this study. The interview notes and transcripts will be kept for three years after my graduation at the home office.

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should you call if you have questions?
If you wish to stop your participation for any reason, you can contact me, C. Sophia Dominguez, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

If you have questions now, you may ask me. If you have questions later, you may contact me (XXX) XXX-XXXX, or my advisor, Beth Durodoye, Ed.D., at (XXX) XXX-XXXX..

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, you may contact the University of Texas at San Antonio Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____   _____
Printed Name of Subject   Signature of Volunteer

_____
Date

_____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

**Exploring Career Decision-Making Experiences of
Mexican American Re-entry Community College Women**

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Sex: Female

2. Ethnicity: Mexican American

3. What is your age? _____

4. What is your relationship status?
   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Divorced
   d. Widowed
   e. Separated
   f. In a relationship
   g. Would rather not say

5. Do you have children and if so, what are their ages?_____

   _____

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Grammar School
   b. High School or equivalent
   c. Vocational/technical school
   d. Some college
   e. Bachelor degree
   f. Other_____

7. How long has it been since you last attended school of any type?_____
   List Months or Years

8. Do you work?   Yes   No   If so, how many hours? _____

9. What is your household's total annual income for the most recent calendar year?
   a. $0 to $10,000
   b. $10,001 to $20,000
   c. $20,001 to $30,000
   d. $30,001 to $40,000
   e. $40,001 to $50,000
   f. $50,001 to $60,000
   g. Higher than $60,000
   h. Would rather not say

10. Where were you born?_____

11. How long have you been living in the United States (if applicable)?_____

12. How many college credits have you earned?_____

13. What is your college major?_____

14. What is your current Grade Point Average (GPA)_____

Research Questions (RQ)

1. How do Mexican American re-entry college women describe their career decision-making experiences?

2. What do Mexican American re-entry college women perceive as the influences of their career decision-making?

3. To what extent were Bandura's four major tenets (i.e., vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, performance accomplishment, and emotional arousal) of self-efficacy expectations are substantiated in the career decision-making experiences of Mexican American re-entry college women?

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Opening
Before we begin, do you have any questions about this study or about confidentiality?

General (Research Questions 1 and 2)
1   When you were growing up and someone asked "What do you want to do when you grow up? What would you say?
2   Tell me about the different occupations you have had in your lifetime.
3   What decisions went into making your occupational choices?
4   What would be your ideal job?

Theoretically Guided Questions (Research Question 3)
5   What has shaped the way you think about the world of work?
    (if needed for probing, "for example, media, books, people")

6   Regarding your current career choice, what do you think influenced your decision to pursue that choice?

7   Who helped you learn about career choices and decisions?

8   Tell me about the types of learning experiences that helped you decide on and pursue your career choice?

9   Tell me about how you felt about some of the experiences you have had in making career decisions?

Miscellaneous: Planning, Information, Resources (Research Questions 1 and 2)
10   What would you need to do to accomplish your career choice?

11   What would you do to get help in making career choices?

12   What do you see as future career challenges?

13   If you were able to create a career services program, what would that look like?

<u>Closing</u>
14   Now I'd like to give you an opportunity to talk about anything that was especially important for you during this interview process.

15   Is there anything you would like to add regarding career decision-making that I may have missed?

APPENDIX D

Frequency of Theme Statements

Category/Theme	Relating Unit Types	Frequency
Research Question 1:		
Parental Messages	Mother	35
	Father	10
	Parents	09
		54
Spontaneous Career Paths	Uncertainty	06
	Lack of Preparation	09
	Happenstance	09
	Substance Abuse	02
	Survival Mode	14
	Personality Trait	02
		42
Helping Others		24
Advocacy and Social Justice Career Aspirations		09
Volunteerism		13
Religious Faith		08
Resource Awareness and Acquisition		12
Familial Responsibility		06
Gender Role Priorities		04
First Generation		03
Saying "No"		02
Media		06
Research Question 2		
Spouse or significant other priorities	Husband	04
	Boyfriend	04
		08

Critical life-changing occurrences		17
Participants' children		07
Research Question 3		
Vicarious Learning		05
Group Work		05
Verbal Persuasion		
Encouragement		12
Discouragement		03
Customer Service Treatment		15
Role Models		09
Performance Accomplishments		
Physical and Cognitive Challenges		09
Emotional Arousal		
Self-Talk		01
One-to-one Counseling Services		05
Ethnic and Gender Preferences		06

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VITA

C. Sophia Dominguez grew up in a small town in Texas. Her relentless desire to experience more in life led her to join the United States Air Force after graduating high school. She was stationed in southern and northern California military bases during her enlistments. Throughout her military career, she gained not only an understanding of the air traffic control profession but invaluable life lessons and skills. She discovered that she enjoyed helping people learn about the world of work and about themselves. She decided to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Workforce Education and Development from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois. Shortly after receiving her Bachelor's degree in 1993, she decided to pursue and earn her Master of Arts degree in Counseling with an emphasis in Career Counseling from Chapman University, Orange, California. Chapman University was where she also earned a second master's degree in Human Resources Management.

She moved to San Antonio, Texas in 1999 to live closer to her immediate family. She gained employment in the community college systems which led her to pursue higher education. Her personal experiences have helped shape her interests in helping others, especially those who are underrepresented.

She is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the state of Texas. She has over 15 years of experience in teaching and providing career and personal counseling to adolescent and adult populations in schools, colleges, corporations, and non-profit agencies. She values individual differences and focuses on developing people's awareness through self-exploration, personal development, and workforce preparation and research.