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*Finding (Economic) Strength through  
Diversity: A Workplace Adaptation to  
Welcome Women*

*An interview with Linda S. Gottfredson, Ph.D., Professor of Educational  
Studies, University of Delaware, Newark.*



Increasing competition in the global market may be one of the best hopes women have to see the workplace become more receptive to their career aspirations. That's because one way of increasing worker productivity, which employers must do more and more to survive, is to help all employees, women included, develop their skills to the fullest extent possible. To that end many organizations are setting up "diversity programs" to make their environment more "welcoming" to women and special groups. But, like anything else still developing, these programs contain potential pitfalls for those trying to reap their benefits.

For this interview Linda Gottfredson agreed to sketch her views of the strengths and weaknesses of diversity programs (see Recommended Readings for her more in-depth discussions of the issue) as well as some related implications for women's career choices and counselling. The discussion took place one quiet November afternoon over the dining room table of her suburban home, disturbed only by the occasional muffled honks of migrating Canada Geese and the raucous calls of blue jays foraging in the lush backyard. She also spoke about her life-long concerns for social justice in the workplace and her own youthful struggles to follow her career interests and aspirations. Two Raggedy-Ann dolls guarding the entryway to her home hinted at the multiple roles which she, like many women professionals,

must juggle; Gottfredson is a now single mother of twin daughters as well as an internationally respected social scientist.

As a social scientist, Gottfredson is probably best known among vocational psychologists, and anyone else interested in women's career aspirations, for her 1981 monograph, *Circumscription and Compromise: A Developmental Theory of Occupational Aspirations*. Her paper observed that all social groups share the same images of occupations, based on job sextype, prestige level and field of work. It described the progressive and usually permanent narrowing of the occupational preferences of both boys and girls from preschool through the college years according to developing self-concepts of gender, social class and intelligence. Her theory then laid out the strategies later used by young people to reach a compromise between these preferences and job availability in the real world. People first sacrifice their preferred field of work while hanging onto hopes for prestige as long as possible. But what threatens people most, she concluded, is the idea of taking on a job of the "wrong" sextype.

Gottfredson's wide-ranging interests regarding the job market's structure and the principles of social justice have also led her to study many other areas of interest to people grappling with the factors circumscribing women's career interests and aspirations, such as fairness in employment testing, the beneficial use of vocational interest inventories and job composition by race, sex, prestige levels and type of work.

However, because of limited space, the following discussion touches only on (1) how Gottfredson's own youthful aspirations were potentially circumscribed (2) how diversity programs could expand the options for women and minorities, as long as political agendas are held at bay, and (3) how women can adapt to these changes to increase their competitiveness for the career of their choice.

### Science and Social Equality: One Woman's Quest

**Smith:** *How did you become interested in career choice, the whole field, not just women's careers?*

**Gottfredson:** The general issue tying all my work together is a fundamental interest in social inequality. What's its nature, how does it come about and how does society handle it? It's an interest that goes back to college. But my interest in science goes back even further. I always loved math and science. When I could imagine myself having a job it was as a scientific technician of some sort.

**Smith:** *Any particular science that caught your fancy or just science in general?*

**Gottfredson:** Primarily biology. I also took chemistry. We didn't have much else in my high school in the way of science. But I was always a kid who was interested in nature, perhaps because we lived in the country and I loved wandering around and collecting insects and stuff like that. And I worked a whole summer in an NSF Science program for high school juniors. I loved that too, working in a laboratory

where they studied things like botulism. Then I worked two years in various capacities in labs to support myself while I was going to college so the love of science was always there. I was interested in how nature works first then later interested in how society and people work.

The interest in social inequality really developed in my college years. It was the sixties civil rights era and I was concerned about racial inequality. I volunteered to tutor in a ghetto school and worked for the Oakland Human Relations Commission as a work-study student. I enjoyed that a lot, investigating among other things, the disproportionate representation of the races in journalism. At that time human relations commissions were new, so I also developed a brochure for them to advertise their services. After college I went into the Peace Corps. So I've had a long standing interest in why people end up different and to what extent these differences are fair or not.

**Smith:** *Did you grow up with other brothers or sisters?*

**Gottfredson:** Yes, three. I'm the oldest and I have a sister two years younger, a brother four years younger, who is multiply handicapped, and then a brother eleven years younger.

**Smith:** *Did having a handicapped brother influenced you in any way, for example, made you doubt if justice and fairness existed for all?*

**Gottfredson:** I don't think so. All I know is that when I was at Berkeley for two years, 1967 to 1969, during the anti-war demonstrations, I disapproved of a lot that was going on. I thought so much public demonstration often was a form of self-aggrandizement for the individuals involved and didn't alter much. I had a sense that what the human relations commission was doing, or sought to do, was the real hard, important work for society, for example, influencing how people found housing or jobs. Arguing with the police on Telegraph Avenue was not the way to help. People I talked to in the demonstrations sometimes had no patience for changing conditions. Their actions seemed like a lot of posturing.

**Smith:** *How did your experience in the Peace Corps affect your sense of social justice? You must have seen a lot of poverty and inequity.*

**Gottfredson:** Malaysia, my assignment, was hardly as poor as other countries in the region, like Indonesia, where I also traveled. What I became aware of, acutely, were the complexities of ethnic relations because Malaysia is a tri-ethnic society, Malay, Chinese and Indian. That's where a lot of my concern first developed about how easily well-intentioned strategies can impede social justice.

I wasn't sure I was going to be able to go there at first because of racial tensions and riots. About that time the government, which is Malay, made Malay the official language, instituted quotas for Malays in various jobs, and ended the use of English in professional schools, which disadvantaged both the Chinese and Indians in the name of some sort of racial quota system. I had a sense of the problems that could cause. But as Peace Corps volunteers we weren't allowed to speak about political issues.

So I've always been one who cared about fairness and justice and doing the right thing. Being competent and being fair to people was a very important part of my self-concept.

**Smith:** *Did your earlier socialization also contribute to these values?*

**Gottfredson:** They took on a special importance to me possibly by substituting for other things in terms of social regard, peers. I grew up in the countryside with one neighbor and I am naturally shy, so I think all of that conspired to make me feel alone, a wallflower. It was difficult to make friends and to feel easy with people. But I gained a lot of self respect from doing well in school and being a good person.

**Smith:** *Was there anybody in your life who had a big influence on your values?*

**Gottfredson:** There are various professional people who I owe a lot to because they've influenced me in one way or another. John Holland is one. I also like being interdisciplinary so I've gotten a lot out of people who've introduced me to other fields. Robert Gordon, my second husband, taught me about the role of intelligence and was also very supportive of my career and shared responsibility for taking care of our family. I deeply appreciated that. More recently, Jan Blits has exposed me to political philosophy.

As for scientific role models they've been people who've combined competence with high intellectual integrity. For example, one person I've always held in high regard is Arthur Jensen, one of the best researchers I know for getting at the heart of a question, and then pursuing it despite arguments that, well, one shouldn't do those sorts of things. There are many others I could also name. So I've always admired people from my earliest years who did what they thought was right although it cost them. As a child those types of people were my heroes in the movies.

**Smith:** *I'd like now to return to your own process of career choice. For example, how did you decide to go on to graduate school? When did the big change in your career aspirations happen?*

**Gottfredson:** In high school it's often hard to gauge realistically what you can and can't do. It was only after the Peace Corps, when someone asked me, "Why not try graduate school?" that I thought of going on. Then after working at The Johns Hopkins University as a research assistant for a year, doing some of the same intellectual work as the professors, I realised, yes, I can do this too. Before that I'd never considered myself as material for anything higher than lab technician. I applied for graduate school and went straight through, switching from psychology to sociology for my graduate work. But I ended up in psychology anyway, with the work that I did.

**Smith:** *You did make fairly traditional academic choices, psychology and sociology. Do you think that was a result of socialized limitations as your theory suggests?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, I think it's consistent with my *real* interests. I love what I do and think various people have found my work useful. I can't imagine a better job than one where you're paid to pursue your intellectual interests.

But what restricted me before graduate school, I guess, was a view of myself as a mother. I married at 19. I'd never really questioned the traditional view of what a mother does and doesn't do. I remember the reasons I wrote in my undergraduate application for wanting more schooling. And it's embarrassing. They all had to do with being a better wife and mother if I could work.

Really, two things affected my aspirations. One, I didn't know my capabilities. I knew that I'd done very well in high school and college but I thought professionals must exist in a different intellectual realm. Two, I considered whether the time and training demands were consistent with being a mother. I can remember as an undergraduate thinking, "What work can I do that will be consistent with having a family?" All I could come up with was doing something out of my home, which wasn't very satisfactory. I really didn't consider beyond that. I always imagined I would be the traditional fifties wife and mother.

**Smith:** *It sounds like you were circumscribed by your traditional gender role very early. Whatever you were going to do had to be consistent with that primary role of wife and mother.*

**Gottfredson:** I didn't question it and no one else around me did either. I don't remember anyone saying explicitly that I should follow that role, but there also wasn't any discussion of doing anything outside of it, which might have made a difference. And second, I felt that compared to males in my family and my first husband's family, people just took me less seriously. It really didn't matter much what I planned for a career. Actually, when I think about it, I really did have a lot of reinforcement for staying home with the kids and not working if you don't have to. And at that time, lacking experience, I just accepted it.

You see, one thing that's always made a difference with me, and I suppose it does with a lot of people, is actually having the chance to be in situations where you learn for yourself what you can and can't do. You start questioning all the things you've taken for granted. So I advise people to seek out experiences that are a little out of the ordinary. The Peace Corps was that for me. It taught me a lot about myself and my own society by being away from it. I gained a strong sense of how much socialization and environment affects a person.

### Origins of a Theory: Circumscription and Compromise

**Smith:** *Gradually you overcame the social forces that threatened to compromise and circumscribe your own career. Then how did your specific interests develop?*

**Gottfredson:** Let me explain my overall interests first. They combine concepts in sociology and psychology and one of sociology's key concerns is social stratification, why are there inequalities and what's fair and unfair. As a graduate student

I was steeped in this area, probably because that was the kind of topic I was already drawn to. I became associated with John Holland, who was in the Sociology Department at that time, and interested in his theory of interests and job choice. I saw how it could apply to certain sociological questions. Sociologists were missing some of the key distinctions in jobs at that time but generally weren't interested in psychological constructs.

At the time my interest in vocational psychology was the sociological issue of who gets ahead, and the systematic characteristics of jobs. For example, how many jobs are there of different Holland types? Then I looked further—how many jobs are there of both different levels and types and what kind of skills and education do they actually require? All these studies provided some insight into the jobs themselves and the distribution of people across them, such as, where are women or blacks most highly represented or underrepresented?

**Smith:** *At this point you weren't specifically interested in women, just special groups in general?*

**Gottfredson:** Right. Various kinds of inequalities or differences and their outcomes—social class differences, sex differences, racial differences. I also began studying handicapped people, dyslexics, where they end up. I was really interested in the whole job system and why different groups seemed to want to go in somewhat different directions. Sociologists in particular seem to assume that everybody wants the same kinds of high level jobs. It's just a matter of what's blocking their way, who gets bumped out of the competition. But sociologists know that equally bright people from different social classes don't have the same social aspirations. That suggests it's not just workplace barriers that turn their eyes away from those jobs. Yet that inconsistency wasn't being addressed by sociology. In contrast, psychology paid a lot of attention to why people have different career aspirations, though mostly for different interest fields, not different levels.

So even before I developed my theory I'd done a lot of work trying to combine the sociological and psychological perspectives on career attainment. Sociologists are interested in women to some extent but more in social class in general, whereas vocational psychology was to a large extent a study of women versus men. So I combined those two as the circumscription and compromise theory.

**Smith:** *What was exciting about it for you personally?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, it was the culmination of a lot of research and thinking. I see some of those ideas in my earlier papers, some pieces of the puzzle that were starting to take shape. I can remember sitting in my basement with piles of papers and it was so exciting because things started to come together. What I loved finding were anomalies that suddenly I could explain. Why do people want different jobs when they all say they admire the same things? Then after working on it, things would just start falling in place.

**Smith:** *But to synthesize all those ideas and come up with something new, you have to have it all in your head, you have to be focused.*

**Gottfredson:** It's not just having it all in your head but being able to pursue it in such a concentrated way without big distractions. Not having to put it aside for a couple of weeks for something else.

## Adapting the Workplace to the Needs of Women and Minorities

**Smith:** *I'd like to turn now to some of your more recent research on changes in the corporate work environment that could realistically broaden women's career options. You've written that our society must work harder to help all workers, women included, develop themselves to their fullest not only in the interest of social justice and equal opportunity but also to maintain global competitiveness. One way is the widespread adoption of diversity programs, part of the "managing diversity" movement described in your chapter in "Working through diversity: Human resources initiatives." Could you explain first of all what we mean by diversity programs?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, it depends on which one you pick. There are a lot of different kinds. It's become a very popular term in the last four years or so. Some are much better than others, some perhaps even harmful. But I think there are two concerns underlying the notion of such diversity programs in either industry or public employment. One is really an extension of affirmative action and includes not only the old employee entry and hiring issues but also promotion. Organizations have discovered in the last decade that they may be able to hire increasingly larger proportions of women and minorities but this has not been matched by their rates of promotion. So now we hear discussions of the glass ceiling and how to develop ways for women and minorities to break through.

The other aspect, which goes beyond affirmative action, is a concern with changing the climate of an organization, so that it actively welcomes and values women and minorities. These programs focus on efforts to lower the turnover rates among women and minorities by fostering both career development and satisfaction with the organization.

**Smith:** *Can we define climate?*

**Gottfredson:** There are many kinds of organizational climates. One definition is to call it the type and tenor of interpersonal relations in an organization and the rigidity of the behavior required of employees. I think the kind of climate we've been interested in with regard to diversity programs is one that at least tolerates, and better yet, accepts and values people from different social, racial or gender backgrounds. We're concerned about the acceptance of different political, intellectual and business views. So it's making the work environment more pleasant, accepting, supportive. But you have to be aware that other groups may perceive that special treatment is being given to some people but not them. The targeting of women or minorities for assistance has frequently led white males to feel neglected. Some white men may say, "Well, I've never found the environment

supportive of me either." Then you are sowing the seeds of discontent. The change has to have wider beneficial effects, not be selective.

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Sometimes you get conflicting ideas about how to integrate diverse kinds of people into the workplace. Some involve making certain kinds of jobs more available or feasible for certain groups, let's say, women. Looking back on my own work life, as a woman and mother, I think some of the considerations that disproportionately affect women include organizational support for child or elder care, and flextime or job sharing. These ideas really involve restructuring both the jobs and their benefits. For example, there have been "Mommy tracks" suggested in industry, which allow part-time or flextime work for mothers, without jeopardizing their seniority rights or future promotions. Likewise, in some universities, people with child care responsibilities, male or female, can take time out, so to speak, from the clock ticking towards tenure decisions. Those kinds of changes greatly ease the burdens which women face in pursuing certain careers, especially those with longer or less flexible hours. I think those steps should help women in pursuing those jobs, if they have the interest.

For now it's very difficult to combine career and family. I can testify to that, with nine-year old twins, raising them more or less alone. But it was hard before I was alone too. Career and family are two very absorbing things and in this society we have not worked out how to do both in a way that works well for everybody. Employers need to adjust to the family needs of their workers, both male and female. A lot of men would like to spend more time with their children but it's not been the manly thing to do.

**Smith:** *They might have felt they'd be penalized too. It's competitive out there.*

**Gottfredson:** I've heard men criticized for spending too much time with their family because that's not how you get ahead. So more family orientation will benefit a number of men as well but it's essential for women or any single parent.

**Smith:** *So both time and benefits need to be made more flexible?*

**Gottfredson:** Yes. With benefit programs the idea is to allow people to choose what their benefits package include, not have a one type-fits-all package. Child or elder care can be one choice. What people often argue, and I think it's true, is that a lot of these changes benefit the entire work force or many segments beyond the group stimulating the concern in the first place. Also, organizations are taking steps which don't change the job itself necessarily, but do change selection or promotion procedures, such as having alternative routes to management positions that don't require the usual four-year degree minorities disproportionately fail to have.

The other major focus of some diversity programs is to change the attitudes and behaviors of employees towards each other. For example, groups of employees meet to confront and discuss their stereotypes and biases.

Now this is where a lot of controversy over diversity programs comes in. Some people fear discussing stereotypes could drum them into people's heads even as we try to root them out. Or merely shift the form of stereotype. In the past we've viewed women in one fixed way that's now considered bad, yet today we're ordering people to look at women still as a group, but in a different way that's possibly equally bad. I don't know that I like women being characterized as all alike in some way, whether it's being more intuitive or less logical or whatever. Individual women differ a lot. I've seen reports, for example, of Indian women, saying, "That description of Indians doesn't fit me nor my tribe and I don't like it."

So while the intent often is good, in showing that stereotypes don't hold for many people in a group, you don't replace them with other stereotypes. Employers have to be aware of average differences in interests, aptitudes or values among groups but they also need more appreciation of the range within any group. I wouldn't want them to think that all women interact differently than men. Or classify all women or all Indians and so on as different from men on some other trait. What I do want is for the men to see that more than one kind of behavior is acceptable.

In some of these programs, what happens, I fear, is that politically correct views become established. There are certain things you're supposed to say or believe about men or women or special groups and any variation isn't tolerated. When a program verges on enforcing such an orthodox belief it can create a lot of underground resentment. The programs I like are the ones emphasizing the importance of the individual, recognizing that each person has his or her own individual needs, constraints and contributions to make. These programs also focus on the variety among individuals, which may be broader now that we have a more diverse workforce. But we shouldn't balkanize society or organizations into rigid groups and assign different privileges to them.

**Smith:** *To paraphrase what you've just said, the guiding principle of these programs becomes "develop individuals, not groups." No individual should be assumed automatically to be representative of his or her group. It also sounds like there has to be a lot of careful planning to develop an effective program.*

**Gottfredson:** Yes, it's an ongoing process. The best programs I've studied are always ongoing anyway, where you're constantly trying something out, discovering its side effects and then changing it accordingly. There's a lot of experimentation, a lot of failure that has to be tolerated as people grope for better ways of doing things. Right now there's lots of good experimentation in the United States, within and across organizations, but what is useful for one company will not necessarily be useful for another. Some companies have a lot of geographically dispersed branches that have to adapt to very localized circumstances and different workforces—for example, a mostly female or Mexican-American work force or old or young and so on. They obviously have to take a more flexible view about

the types of diversity programs in place in their various units than, say, a very unified, centralized corporation. So whether a company can get by with one policy or needs several localized policies will depend on the circumstances.

A general issue for employers is to make greater use of the workforce since the number of incoming workers is shrinking and consists more of minorities, women and more hard-to-train people. No longer do organizations have the luxury of picking employees who fit the organization but must change the organization to fit the employee. People discussing diversity initiatives often point to the fact that employers simply have to make better use of all their employees now. That includes men too. I think one could rightly say there's a lot of room for improving the career and skills development options of all workers. Therefore what may be driven in part by desire or need to integrate women and minorities is leading to a general change in how one views the work force, towards less turnover perhaps.

So the most constructive diversity programs in my view are ones that involve good management anyway, and somehow meet the needs of everybody. They pay attention to the particular skills, weaknesses and constraints of individual workers, which differ for women and men on the average, but also differ among men themselves. Men are differentially skilled and have different family circumstances and needs in career development.

**Smith:** *Are these kinds of programs actually increasing the numbers of women entering and staying in the nontraditional jobs in industry?*

**Gottfredson:** I assume they are, but it's hard to get hold of any evidence, probably because it's so politically and emotionally charged. The programs are also new and the few evaluations done often have been incomplete or unsystematic. And a lot of companies feeling vulnerable to public criticism may not want their evaluations known, especially if they fail. So there's a lot of hype. Often the evidence put forward to show the programs are working has nothing to do with their original goals. Or a strict body count is used—"we've gone from 10 to 20 percent female employees"—which simple quotas could also achieve. It's not clear what's producing the change in numbers or what's the resulting quality of the work climate. It's hard to call a program successful if the women are happy but the men are not.

**Smith:** *Let's turn to how the results of these diversity programs fit in with your theory. You've said that narrowing of career possibilities occurs in the early years of life. Do you think the climate changes occurring in organizations are actually encouraging young women to re-expand their career options?*

**Gottfredson:** What's viewed as acceptable for women has changed a lot in the last couple of decades so that a lot more young women are considering professions, getting higher degrees. But I don't know if that has anything to do with the diversity initiatives per se. Starting with the Women's Movement there was concern and effort to have women open up their options but, and this is only a hypothesis, they've primarily aspired higher in the same fields as before, rather than moved into different, less traditional interest fields. There's still the relationship between gender and interest. For example, we have ten times as many women

going into graduate physics as we used to but still only about twelve percent are women. On the other hand, women continue to be overrepresented in education.

This may be due to men and women on the average being fairly different in their interests. Why that's so is not clear. Some of it may very well be biological and any biological difference is probably magnified by society. That certainly seems to be the case so far. For example, we have lots more women in medicine, but women have always been interested in biology, helping others.

**Smith:** *But now they become doctors instead of nurses. And instead of being an elementary school teacher, a girl might aim to be a high school principal or college professor. But that's still an interest in teaching.*

**Gottfredson:** Yes. Now in Holland's Conventional field, such as office or secretarial work, you may see women leaving for something more congenial to their interests. There isn't much higher level Conventional work to aspire to and their interests may not have been there anyway. Many women go into secretarial work because it's temporary and doesn't require a lot of credentials or retraining to go into the job market. But as their options open they'll move into something more feminine, perhaps social or artistic fields. Women generally don't go from office worker to construction worker, even though they're fairly closely related, in fact next door in Holland's theory. But one is still very stereotypically feminine, one stereotypically male. The number of women is probably not increasing much in mid- and lower-level traditionally male jobs.

Another possibility is that women will move up into work which is really androgynous. Physician is not masculine, lawyer is not really masculine. At one time physician may have been more masculine in the sense that it tapped into investigative talents but you can imagine a field or job changing somewhat as the mix of people or genders in it changes. In fact I've written a paper on how that can happen. For example, I've heard people say psychology's becoming more feminized. More women are entering psychology and they tend to be interested in clinical psychology. I don't know if that's contributed to the fact that the U.S. has two psychological associations, one research and one clinically oriented. But I bet you'll find women mostly in the latter.

## Research Needs in Diversity Programs

**Smith:** *You've stated that evaluation of diversity programs is difficult. Therefore what research do we still need to do in this area to find out the best ways to make the workplace congenial to women and special groups?*

**Gottfredson:** For one thing, it's not clear to me why women, minorities and other special groups do or don't get ahead or what the problems are behind differences in promotion rates and so on. One of my concerns is that there's been so much emphasis on the advantages of the white male, the unfair obstacles, that people may not realize how hard it is to get ahead for reasons other than race or sex. Some may say, "Well I'm in. The wheels should be greased." But it's not like that. We

also can't expect women to end up with the same distribution of jobs as men even if we eliminate discrimination. For a variety of reasons women do have different interests and we'll find fewer with interest in engineering, at least at this point in time.

So parity of numbers in a given job is not an appropriate criterion for assessing whether there have been unfair barriers. Different people come in with different interests, values and abilities and that produces differences in employment outcome. I'm not sure we've always appreciated that. For example, I'd expect that fewer women with families would feel they realistically have the option or desire to be promoted into jobs demanding a lot of time away from home. In the past a lot of women have simply ruled out jobs or careers for reasons having nothing to do with ability. Now as jobs change, maybe their choices will also differ.

**Smith:** *Do we need more research to find out what's happening in those areas?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, we need to be more open minded to these issues anyway. I'm not sure more research will help. There's so much sensitivity in this area, so many political agendas.

**Smith:** *Then it's not just our knowledge gap that limits the kinds of programs set up to help women and minorities fit into the workplace. There are other more dominating considerations?*

**Gottfredson:** Yes, and they affect the extent to which you'll learn of the effects of these programs. I recently read an article in *Science* magazine on the relationship between social science evidence and social policy. It pointed out that failure to link the two could come about for several reasons. One is lack of knowledge, but then among others are political constraints, which means that even if you learn certain things from more research you have to ignore them.

**Smith:** *Does that mean a woman going into a nontraditional field may have problems finding out what she's getting into because of the lack of candid information?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, it's tough for anybody, but especially for people going into settings where there aren't many like them to talk to or learn from, such as women with families who've had to handle the job. If you're a pioneer, you face an unknown territory and sometimes you have to grapple with the problems as they come.

## Getting Information on Diversity Programs

**Smith:** *If a woman has been thinking about entering a particular career, then landing a job in a particular company, is it useful to find out first if the company has a diversity program, its rates of promotion of women, etcetera?*

**Gottfredson:** I think a person looking for a job in any organization would want to know something about its climate and the degree to which it recognizes individual differences. That's obviously a concern for a person going into a

cross-sex atmosphere, male or female, though it's more often women facing that situation. At the same time I wouldn't want to go in and seem like I had a chip on my shoulder or was ready to find bias everywhere. So instead of asking what do you do for women in particular, ask what kinds of monitoring or career development assistance do you have for employees. Are there mentoring or personal development programs? Don't be surprised to find many have none.

And certainly I'd be careful in evaluating what I was told. Are you going to be ghettoized in some way by the very measures supposedly helping you fit in? You also want to distinguish what's hype and window dressing, what isn't. There's such diversity in programs that I'd try to exercise independent judgment about what they're doing and not take the line as given.

## Counselling Considerations

**Smith:** *I'd like to ask you to take a more general view now. Given the changes we've just discussed in the workplace, what advice could you give young women about choosing a career?*

**Gottfredson:** One major dimension to consider when looking at your options is the mental difficulty of the job—skill demands. It seems to me that any sort of useful and realistic counselling has to take that into account. My concern has been that vocational psychology had not paid much attention to ability as opposed to interest differences. So in my own work I set out to characterize jobs according to their ability requirements. That's how I developed the Occupation Aptitude Pattern Map, to give people a view of the entire workworld using a manageable number of job categories, little more than a dozen, rated by interest type and skill level. The job levels were related mostly to the amount of intelligence demanded. The job types were related to specific abilities, interests or activities required on the job. I've also developed but never published—I got side tracked by other issues—a counselling strategy starting with this map.

**Smith:** *Can this strategy help women widen their traditionally narrow range of career choices?*

**Gottfredson:** Well, there's been concern that women, and other groups, only explore a narrow area. So how do counsellors open choice up without making it unmanageable? Using my map as a counselling tool, I argued that people should look first at broad job categories and descriptions on this map and find what intellectual level they wanted to work at, not worry immediately about the particulars of any job. Next the person should look at adjacent general job areas, explore them and then zero in on something. As a counsellor you challenge them with, "Why this choice, what about that career?" in a general way so they can see the relationships among all the groups. Only then do you give in-depth information about anything and start them exploring how to be competitive in those areas.

**Smith:** *This approach requires clients to be very aware of their ability levels and interests?*



**Gottfredson:** Not necessarily. I had it arrayed according to five educational levels and people can pretty much assess if a level is too difficult or easy for them. They'll say, "Professional is too difficult for me. I'm more the nurse type." Maybe they're using test scores, grades, SATs, who knows what. But you say back to them, "Okay, now I want you to look at one level above the one you've chosen and one level below," to encourage them to consider all their options.

Overall, I think you want to encourage women to examine their options and be realistic about their skills. The issue is not to decide immediately where you fit, given your interests and abilities, but where you want to go and how to make yourself more competitive to get there, especially if you're not competitive in some way now.

**Smith:** *So the key is assessing the skills required to get you where you want to go and not giving up because you don't have them now.*

**Gottfredson:** Right. My work tries to reconcile the goals of promoting exploration and promoting realism. People have to be realistic in the sense that they need information about themselves and the jobs, to know how competitive they are and which jobs are better bets, but they can also start thinking about becoming more competitive. Then they can set their sights higher, with probably a fall back position. So think of several possibilities you're interested in, then plan how to improve your competitive position. If a kid is in the lower half of a test score's distribution, a counsellor could say, "You might get into this program with those scores but you should develop other skills to increase your chances."

**Smith:** *Getting a crack at the career you want is a matter of odds?*

**Gottfredson:** Your odds of getting in and succeeding may be low or high but you can change those odds. On the other hand, you can't overlook them. If you're not competitive you can't go in and say, "Well, here I am. I sure hope things turn out." They might and they might not. But most people have lots of untapped potential and if you put yours to work you can be more competitive. Now you may have to always work harder in some areas than other people in the same job, but if you want to make that trade off you can. Of course, some things you can't trade off below a certain level. You simply may not be bright enough, but often special talents can offset that deficit.

**Smith:** *You could find a niche within a field by developing special talents.*

**Gottfredson:** Yes. A lot of people stumble through career development. They wander from job to job, taking what's easy and available and end up doing that for life. But I think if you take a more self-development point of view, you can often increase your odds of doing what you want. Employers are always looking for employees who can become greater assets to the organization, though that depends somewhat on how tightly bureaucratic or open they are.

**Smith:** *You mentioned earlier the role of experience in your own life. How important is it in general for making career choices?*

**Gottfredson:** If people are not giving you feedback about what you can or should do, all the possibilities, then you need to gather personal experience to learn that on your own. I've talked to other women who finished professional or advanced degrees a little later than normal because they worked for a while first. What they've said is the work experience gave them a chance to slowly grow into realizing what they could do on the one hand and what really satisfied them on the other. Sometimes you decide to try something and surprise yourself by enjoying it although that activity may not have been typical for your mother's generation. Those of us who ended up in our careers that way are lucky. I've been concerned for a time about some young women being pushed too hard to do new things. There are a lot of women out there who are the first wave into many occupations in large numbers and maybe other people don't realize the costs to those women of pushing.

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Women have to be careful when making any choice, traditional or nontraditional, and not let themselves be pushed by the expectations of others.

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Like in law. I remember reading some years back about a number of talented women who entered that profession and found it wasn't for them. There were big conflicts between family, work and their interests. They'd followed the new prescribed route for women as unthinkingly as other women had followed the old. Women have to be careful when making any choice, traditional or nontraditional, and not let themselves be pushed by the expectations of others. I can imagine a fair number of women out there whose mothers felt cheated because they didn't have a job and now their daughters feel cheated because they didn't have a family of their own or the time for the kind of family they wanted.

**Smith:** *Final question. Do you think that being a mother, with first-hand experience in balancing family and career, has influenced your theories about women's career choices?*

**Gottfredson:** I can't say it's affected my theoretical orientation but it has made it more personal. I know I think about my daughters when I think about the work world—what kind of world I want them to live in and what kind of women I want them to be.



## References and Recommended Readings

- Gottfredson, L. (1978). An analytical description of employment according to race, sex, prestige, and Holland-type of work. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 13, 210-221.
- Gottfredson, L.S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28, 545-579.
- Gottfredson, L.S. (1985). Role of self-concept in vocational theory. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32, 159-162.
- Gottfredson, L.S. (1985). Dilemmas in developing diversity programs. In S. E. Jackson (Ed.). *Working through diversity: Human resources initiatives*. New York: Guildford.

## Significant Events in the Life of Linda Gottfredson

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| 1969    | Receives BA, Psychology, University of California, Berkeley                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1969-72 | Peace Corps volunteer, Malaysia.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1976    | Takes position as Research Scientist, The Johns Hopkins University                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1977    | Ph.D., Sociology, The Johns Hopkins University                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 1981    | Publishes monograph, "Circumscription and Compromise."                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 1982    | Two daughters born                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1986    | Takes faculty position, University of Delaware.<br>Edits special journal issue, "The g [Intelligence] Factor in Employment."                                                                                                                                         |
| 1988    | Co-edits special journal issue, "Fairness in Employment Testing."                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1989    | Receives tenure, University of Delaware, with strong support from department.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 1989-90 | Publishes articles with Jan Blits on race-norming in employment testing, spurring a national debate                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1990    | Promoted to full professor despite strong opposition from department.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 1990    | University bans Gottfredson's source of research funding on ideological grounds                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 1989-92 | Gottfredson and Blits charge that the University of Delaware is repeatedly violating their academic freedom in teaching and research, failing to protect their rights, and retaliating against them for defending their rights.                                      |
| 1991    | A national arbitrator orders the University to rescind its 16-month-old funding ban.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1992    | Gottfredson and Blits reach an out-of-court settlement with the University of Delaware resolving all outstanding disputes.<br>Gottfredson begins projects on the relationship of employment testing to national debates over civil rights and economic productivity. |
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