

CAREERING  
GENERATING A PATH FROM UNCERTAINTY  
TO DISCOVERY by Lisa Sydow, May 2013

**Abstract**

It is a sign of postmodern times that the popular construct of *career*, used for making sense of one's working life, has become obsolete for many. In this dissertation, the concept of career is examined by applying social constructionist principles generating a new term: *careering*. Careering, as opposed to career, lays the ground for a more flexible and relevant approach to understanding and cultivating one's work trajectory. Alternative renderings of career are particularly relevant for women in society, because traditional notions of career as a consistent and linear progression often stand in contrast to many women's interrupted career patterns linked to family-related life choices and limited opportunities within certain career paths. Based on this development in women's lives, careering is examined as a possible framework for making sense of their career paths. Appreciative Inquiry methods provided the foundation for the use of positive-oriented career stories. The study involved cross-generational pairings of women and girls sharing such stories. In addition, a qualitative methodology was adapted from The Listening Guide, an analytic tool developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan and her colleagues, who introduced a relational, voice-centered theory for understanding women's development. Participants' shared storytelling sessions are presented as short performances. This choice of presentation for the data draws attention to the participants' shared constructions. The findings strongly suggest that career is a dynamic, relationally based process for the women and girls in this study, affirming one of the central tenets of careering. In addition, it was apparent that although participants expressed uncertainty retrospectively and currently about their career moves, it was within their relationships with each other and with others mentioned in their stories that they discovered how to proceed in meaningful ways.

