

Special Section: Interest Inventory Interpretation

Interpreting Interest Inventories: A Case Example

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Interest inventory interpretation is one of the most frequently used interventions in career counseling. As a beginning counselor, I found myself astounded by the ability of my senior colleagues to describe and understand nuances of an individual's behavior just from examining her or his interest inventory profile. As I worked to develop skill at inventory interpretation, I repeatedly read a book edited by Donald Zytowski (1973). What made this book so useful was chapter 9, "Illustrative Interpretations of Inventories," which contained examples of interest inventory developers interpreting the profiles of three clients. Studying the text of their interpretations allowed readers to scrutinize how highly skilled practitioners interpreted interest profiles.

This special section of *The Career Development Quarterly* is an attempt to emulate Zytowski's classic book by having expert career counselors interpret their favorite interest inventories. In consultation with Arnold Spokane, I chose to include five widely used interest inventories. Then we identified career counselors who each use one of these inventories with great success and recruited them to do a blind interpretation of that inventory. The inventories and their interpreters include: Campbell Interest and Skill Survey (Kathleen Boggs), Kuder Occupational Interest Survey (Donald Zytowski), Self-Directed Search (Jack Rayman), Strong Interest Inventory (Jeffrey Prince), and the Unisex Edition of the ACT Interest Inventory (Dale Prediger & Edward Schmertz). In addition, Linda Subich agreed to interpret the Skills Confidence Inventory, an optional part of the Strong Interest Inventory, and Paul Hartung agreed to interpret the Salience Inventory and the Values Scale, two inventories that

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some counselors use in conjunction with interest inventories (Osborne, Brown, Niles, & Miner, 1997).

Each of these career counselors received a summary of the initial interview with an actual client who had recently sought career counseling, Ellenore Flood (a pseudonym). Ms. Flood volunteered to participate in this project and made it possible by responding to all of the inventories, granting permission to use the summary of her initial interview, which she edited, providing copies of her inventory results to the authors of the articles, and writing a response to their interpretations of her inventory results. In addition to Ms. Flood's response, Arnold Spokane contributed an article that examines the similarities and differences in the inventories and their interpretations.

The authors hope that this special section of the *Quarterly* will allow readers to learn more about interest inventory interpretation. We think it provides a unique opportunity to examine how five inventories profile the interests of a single client. What follows is the summary of the initial interview that was given to the article authors. The only other information they received about Ms. Flood was the profile for the particular interest inventory that they interpreted.

ELLENORE FLOOD: SUMMARY OF THE INITIAL INTERVIEW

Ellenore Flood is a 29-year-old, White woman who works as a high school teacher of English and French. At the beginning of her interview, she asked the career counselor to "Help me sort out all of the things I've got going right now—job possibilities, making decisions, focusing."

Ellenore thought that within 4 months, she had to choose from four career options: renewing her teaching contract, applying for a teaching position at an American school in Italy, beginning a doctoral program, or taking a marketing job in the European office of a former employer. Each alternative included a specific prospective position for which Ellenore was well-qualified. Faced with so many options, Ellenore said, "I can't decide. I'm treading water."

The need to choose arose because Ellenore had just ended a 3-year relationship with her boyfriend. She could not afford to continue in her position as a high school teacher because her monthly bills exceeded her pay. She concluded, "I have to get out of there."

When asked to recapitulate where she had been, Ellenore reported that she began her college education as an international relations major. She chose this major because she had been inspired by her high school world history teacher, who "just opened up the world, which is what led me to love traveling and teaching." As a sophomore, Ellenore observed that graduating seniors were not getting positions in the field of international relations. Ellenore switched majors to communications and eventually earned a bachelor of arts in public relations, with a teaching certificate, magna cum laude. During college, she paid her way by working as a bartender and as a waitress.

While still in college Ellenore secured a position in the advertising department of a company that made food products. After working for

2 years, her employer encouraged her to apply for a scholarship to study multicultural education at a graduate program in Australia. Ellenore did so and won the scholarship. A year later, after completing a graduate diploma, she returned to the U.S., where she quickly found a position as an advertising copy writer. She stayed in that position for 18 months, but wanted to return to teaching. She interviewed for teaching jobs in Taiwan and England. She was offered both positions and chose the job in London. The next year she returned home to begin her current position as a high school teacher. In addition to teaching American literature and French, Ellenore directed the drama program, supervised the speech club, and advised the student yearbook staff. After the first year in her current position, Ellenore enrolled in graduate school (where she had a 3.9 grade point average), and took evening classes to complete a master's degree in Cultural Foundations of Education, with an emphasis on Multicultural Education. When asked to explain how she selected that program, Ellenore said: "It has all the multicultural stuff. My interest in this area all started when one of my high school students said, 'I do not know what prejudice is.'" Ellenore wrote her thesis on White racial identity. The study involved a training program—an educational component. While in Australia, she published one article on identity and planned to publish her thesis when she graduated.

After a day at work, attending graduate classes, and exercising, Ellenore had little time left for leisure. When she had some free time, Ellenore enjoyed throwing pots, reading, surfing the net, gourmet cooking, and wine tasting.

When asked how she evaluated the four options she mentioned at the beginning of the interview, Ellenore said,

I like school. I like being in a classroom. I like teaching. I like learning. I am thinking about the doctoral program in cultural foundations. They have suggested a teaching fellowship, which is very appealing, but I don't want to get into the wrong thing and then hate it. For some reason I am putting the brakes on that. I can see myself teaching in a university but the research scares me. I think that I would enjoy training, diversity training, and communication training. Intercultural communication would be my first choice of doctoral program.

I could easily do marketing. Millions of people have told me to do sales, but I do not see myself doing that. Nevertheless, money is becoming more important to me. I love teaching for teaching's sake yet someday I'd like to have a loft apartment with a nice view of a city and a decent car. I'd also like to go shopping because I love to shop.

When I was in Borders Bookstore last week, I, as usual, found myself drawn to the section with books on careers. I picked up *What Color Is Your Parachute* and remembered that I first looked at this book in 1993. It made me think that I have been in this same spot since then. I have not felt settled for the last 4 years. I have not felt like I wanted what I had. I have been restless for a long time and I'm tired of it.

During the final minutes of the initial interview, the counselor asked Ellenore about her family of origin.

I'm the classic blue-collar kid. That's what I come from. My father was a firefighter and my mother was a nurse. My brothers are all 2 years apart. I have older brothers who are 45, 43, 41, and 39. Then my sister is 36 and I'm 28. I'm the "oops" in the family. My mom always told me my sister wanted a sister. But I was too smart to fall for that because I would ask, "How did you know that I would be a girl?" My sister and I fought all the time. My father died when I was 5 and my mother worked her butt off. I do not remember a lot about it.

The counselor asked Ellenore what career advice her family had given to her. She replied,

Mom always teased me that I would be a bus driver. My mom taught me to read long before I was in school, like when I was 4 years old. She used to sit down with me with little cards and practice reading. To me that was like the golden moment—me and Mom hanging out. And I suppose she wanted me to be a teacher. I have no memory of what Dad would have wanted. I don't know what my brothers and sister thought then but now they all have ideas. My oldest brother, who is a computer salesperson, thinks that I should be a salesperson. The next one, a professional musician, thinks I should be an advertising executive. The next one, a commercial photographer, thinks writer. Bob, who is a police officer and sells health food, . . . I don't know. I guess he thinks that I should travel around the world. My sister is a counselor and she thinks I should be a mother. But not teaching, all of them have said that to me.

Ellenore had been to three other career counselors, each of whom failed to help her clarify her choices and make a decision. She knew from talking with them that she had strong and almost equal interest in Enterprising, Artistic, and Social occupations. This knowledge added to her confusion. Although perplexed about her future and anxious to make the right choice, Ellenore was trying to approach her next career move in a rational manner. However, she believed there were too many choices open to her. She was multi-talented, had a good education and successful work experiences, displayed superb interpersonal skills and confidence, and possessed a network of contacts who could help her implement whatever career choice she made. As she talked with her counselor, Ellenore sifted through her restless past when she consciously strained to decisively chart a future course. Her opening statement echoed in the counselor's mind . . . "making decisions, focusing."

Following are the interpretations of the inventories completed by Ms. Flood, beginning in alphabetical order with the Campbell Interest and Skill Survey.

REFERENCES

- Osborne, W. L., Brown, S., Niles, S., & Miner, C. U. (1997). *Career development assessment and counseling: Applications of the Donald E. Super C-DAC approach*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
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