

KOLACZ-BELANGER, VILMA, Ph.D., May 2008

Curriculum and
Instruction

**WOMEN OF OPPORTUNITY: CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENCED
WOMEN IN COMPUTING AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CAREERS**
(303 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Trish Koontz, Ph.D.

Women are underrepresented in computing careers. This study investigated factors that influence women to choose a computing career and to persist in it. The purposely chosen participants for this study were computing women with at least a bachelor's degree and at least five years experience in the field. Experienced computing women were chosen because of the belief that the lives of women who chose the career, persist in it, and are successful in their career paths contain important information to enlighten the study of women's choices in this field and to make recommendations for the recruitment of more women into the computing/information technology field.

This study used a mixed methods design. Fifty computing women completed a 60-question online survey. Twenty-two of the survey participants then completed follow-up telephone interviews of a semi-structured format. The participants answered questions about (a) their family, school, and college backgrounds; (b) their individual preferences and personal characteristics; (c) when and why they chose a computing career; (d) their likes and dislikes about their careers; (e) why they remain in computing; and (f) who and what has influenced them to choose and to persist in a computing career. Survey and interview responses were analyzed for common categories.

This study found that most computing women (a) had working mothers during their growing-up years; (b) possess strong high school mathematics and science backgrounds; (c) have fathers and mothers with a higher level of education than the general public; (d) were encouraged by someone, usually a male, in their computing careers; (e) either chose a computing career in college or “fell into it” in the workplace; (f) like their work, especially the challenge and constant change of the field; (g) use their people skills at work and like that aspect of their jobs; (h) are aware of discrimination in the field, although some did not experience it and discrimination appears to be lessening; (i) recommend it as a good career for other women; (j) at work, often combine their computing skills with knowledge of another field; (k) have few, if any, children.