

# CAREER COUNSELING WITH REGARD TO GENDER

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***Abstract:** The career counseling service has been added to operations of the career Office of the T.E.I. of Crete in the beginning of the year 2000. This poster presents some findings on how different gender attitudes affect the counseling procedure.*

**Keywords:** *Career Counseling, Gender, Stereotypes, Self-efficacy, Women Counseling*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to identify the influence of gender in the counseling process, as it has been observed during the five years of experience in the Career Office, as well as to associate the experimental findings with the relative bibliography.

## 2. CAREER COUNSELING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A few years ago, the dominant model in the area of career counseling, was the one of matching people to professions, which gave to the career choice a static attribute. According to this theory, one made his or her career choice in a certain time, usually towards the end of obligatory education, and this choice had to last for the total of his professional career (Crites, 1969). Today, beyond the volatile regard of professional choices and career path, the process of career decision-making is considered as particularly important (Phillips and Pazienza, 1988).

The term, professional growth, or career development was adopted by Super (1990) in order to underline that the career path of an individual is not completed with the choice of profession but constitutes a continuous process. One may have a stable model of career, maintain the same job for many years, or make frequent changes from work placement to work placement, change profession, work without being paid for a long period of time, or even, quite often in our days, remain unemployed

(Kantas & Chantzi , 1991). Therefore, the objectives of career counseling extend beyond the guidance of the individual on issues related to his work, into the remaining sectors of his personal life, which coexist in any educational or professional choice and decision.

### **3. CAREER COUNSELING PROVIDED BY THE CAREER OFFICE**

The Career Office of the T.E.I. of Crete, founded in 1997, incorporated career counseling into the services provided in the beginning of the year 2000. During the last five years of operation, 1967 students and graduates of the Institute have visited the office seeking for information on opportunities for graduate studies in Greece and abroad, opportunities for further education and vocational training, information on study scholarships or entrance examinations, as well as career planning, CV writing, career counseling etc. The availability of a small reading room and a computer lab, along with the several handouts offered, support the procedure of counseling. Moreover, among the most important activities of the counselor is the arrangement of workshops and seminars on subjects such as: CV creating, Portfolio Creating, Job Finding and Applying Strategies, Preparing for an Interview, and Career Planning and Management.

The objectives of counseling are actually determined each time by the individuals or the team being counseled. As a procedure, it aims in the support of the individuals to adopt/demonstrate behavior or behaviors that satisfy them more. As far as career counseling is concerned, this means the support of the individuals, to better comprehend the frame in which their choices are shaped, to strengthen their personal characteristics, and thus maximize the probability to achieve their objectives and draw satisfaction from them. The individual counseling process is focused on the needs, and on facilitating the process of searching for answers to the questions placed by the person consulted. The interview constitutes the main methodological tool, while information is most important in all the stages of the development of the counseling process. Team counseling on the other hand, aims in the sensitization of all the members of the team in common needs and issues of interest. Its character is mainly preventive, but also interventionist, instructive and informative, in certain cases.

#### *3.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS, PARTICULARITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS*

During the last five years, 65% of the users of the career counseling service were students and 35% were graduates. This is expected, as it is easier for students to drop by the office every time they have some kind of need. Concerning their age, our visitors are between 18 and 25 years old, a developmental phase, the known as post-adolescence phase, or first youth, which for certain developmental psychologists, is also considered as a separate developmental phase. This means that in this age, the developmental requirements of adolescence are still not completed and a lot of crises,

typical for this age, as the crisis of identity, are in elation. Moreover, registering and studying in Higher Education is considered as a "critical incident in the life" that is to say an important transient stage where the individual is called to develop new strategies of adaptation (Kalantzi – Azizi , 2001 and Aggriiotou , 2000).

Other particularities of the given population are:

- they have already selected or even completed their studies in a field, that may not have been their first preference - what they actually wanted or dreamed of studying (the factor of chance constitutes a imponderable factor when they choose fields of study),
- they have probably realized during their studies, that the field they chose does not correspond to their real wishes, interests and personality,
- they have realized, that their studies –even in the case that they were their first choice - do not ensure settlement or the professional career, they expected,
- the need of acquisition of additional formal qualifications begins –towards the end of their studies – to constitute their main concern.

### *3.2 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS, PARTICULARITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS OF THE WOMEN SEEKING COUNSELING – PARAMETERS THAT MAY AFFECT THE COUNSELING PROCESS.*

In the relative bibliography, certain parameters are reported, that in combination with the characteristics of the given population described in the previous section, are likely to affect the counseling process and differentiate it more or less depending on the gender. A few of these parameters that were pointed out by our own experience as capable to influence any intervention by the counselor, as well as their initial correlation with the relative data found in the literature, follow.

According to our findings, the choice of profession according to the stereotypes realized already by the adolescent age, the segregation of the job market in masculine and feminine professions, and the over-concentration of women in certain professional sectors, influence en continuity the professional development of women. Even in our days, young women, appear to keep on selecting programs of study of "theoretical direction", humanitarian and social sciences, while the reproduction of sexist stereotypes exists also in the Technical –Vocational Education, where the choices of specialties reflect the discrimination that prevails in the job market based on sex. Women continue to select professions that are related with the domestic economy (aesthetics, fashion), the benefit of care (nursing, social work) and the services (tourism, secretarial support) (Koronaïou, Dimitrouli , and Tiktapanidou , 2002). These findings could be connected with our data concerning the number of men and women from each School of the Institute that have visited our office seeking counseling. Among the 1967 individuals consulted in total, it appears that the majority of women emanates from the School of Management and Economics, with 490

consulted women and 259 men, followed by the School of Health and Welfare Services, with 210 women and 31 men consulted. The School of Management and Economics consists of the Department of Accounting, the Department of Tourism and Hotel Management and the Department of Co-operatives (recently renamed to Department of Business Administration) while the School of Health and Welfare Services consists of the Department of Nursing, the Department of Social Work, and the Department of Human Nutrition and Dietetics. On the contrary men from the school of Applied Sciences, consisting of the Departments of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Applied Information Technology & Multimedia, outnumber the women arrived (560 men and 255 women have visited the office) while the arrivals from the school of Agricultural Technology are almost identical (61 men and 81 women) with regard to gender.

Self-efficacy and the interests of the individual consulted are considered among the most important elements for forecasting his or her future career. The faith of the individual that he or she possesses the abilities and the skills to pursue a certain profession or program of study, are projected on his later course. The women tend to have lower expectations, according to the observed data, for their personal sufficiency and capability to become successful in areas, where prevails the male presence (Hackett and Benz, 1981). It is observed that women follow a different process when planning their career, as the provocative double role of the working mother and spouse is likely to cause internal conflicts and force them into compromises. The given data, could only indirectly be connected with the so important for the process of counseling issues, unbreakably connected with the self-esteem and self-worth of the person, the ambitions and motives that prompt one to claim and achieve the professional rise and development.

Among the 530 students and graduates that sought information on graduate studies, 250 were men and 280 were women showing that in our case women appear to appreciate enough their potential and to claim a professional career even in fields that are traditionally dominated by men (more than the 1/3 of the students originated from the School of Applied Sciences that expressed interest in graduate studies were women). Another interesting element that strengthens the above statement is the number of women that seek information on entrance examinations for other academic programs of study. Among the 136 arrivals, 102 were women, suggesting that women do not hesitate to proceed in corrective movements when necessary, and that they are willing to dedicate more time and labor in their studies, in order to make a career in the original or in a different area from the one initially chosen and satisfy their ambitions and their dreams. Moreover, more women than men seek information on further education and training. It emerges from our data, that women do not hesitate to claim a better professional future, despite the double or even triple role in which they are called to succeed.

Career planning appears to trouble strongly our students, and this becomes apparent from the fact that the workshops arranged regularly attract an important number of

them. During the last five years, 270 students and graduates (165 women among them) participated in the ten workshops organized. On the other hand, demand for individual counseling did not exhibit any important differentiation depending on the sex.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF THE CAREER ADVISER

The career adviser has to be particularly sensitive and knowledgeable concerning the issues of professional development of women. The possible restrictions of the several theories and techniques applied in career counseling have to be recognized and avoided – if not functional - when women are consulted. It is a fact that the career development and the professional behavior of women is different in many ways.

However, the adviser that takes into consideration the women's psychology, the familial and the wider socio-economic and political environment of the person consulted (with whatever this can mean for the development of the personality and professional profile) and focuses on the demands and the questions that emerge from the interview, through an open view, he can play catalytic role in the development of the process, and facilitate with his intervention. Professional plans, that are realistic, the rejection of the stereotypes about gender and the dedication to the continuous pursue of a better place in the professional track, constitute the basis for the advisory process targeted to women. Ultimate goal of the counselor is the personal satisfaction, the professional award, along with the reconciliation between the familial and the professional life of the woman consulted.

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