Career identities of first-year female coloured students

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It is a well-acknowledged fact that the role of women in society has been changing worldwide over recent decades and South Africa has not been exempt from this trend. Dramatic changes — politically, socially, economically and educationally — have occurred in South Africa since its first democratic, non-racial elections in 1994, which have affected the lives of all citizens. These changes have had major implications for South African women, also regarding their identities. This necessitates a re-evaluation of the prior conceptualisation of identity among women, an issue which has moved from the periphery of academic discourse to the centre. The objective in this research was to explore and describe the career identities of a group of first-year female coloured students in post-apartheid South Africa. A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design was implemented. Using purposive sampling, data were collected during six focus group interviews with the students. The findings of the study are presented under four central themes which emerged, namely, the participants' perspectives on career issues; self-knowledge; factors influencing career identities and career choices; and concerns regarding career development. Finally, recommendations are presented in this regard.

Key words: *career identities; coloured; female; first-year; post-apartheid; qualitative research; South African; transformation*

Introduction and rationale for the research

Globally, the role of women in society is changing at a phenomenal rate. This view is supported by Castells (1997:136) who contends that the transformation tempo of women's consciousness in most societies in the last three decades has been dramatic and has had fundamental consequences for the entire human experience, from political power to the structure of personality. Major factors contributing to the changing role of women are *inter alia* the transformation of the economy and the labour market worldwide, together with the provision of increasing educational opportunities for women. Major changes emerged in South Africa after 1994 with the election of the first democratic, non-racial government and the acceptance of a new Constitution in 1996 (Stead & Watson, 1998:290). According to Mokoena (1999:1) the new political dispensation has brought with it radical changes in all spheres of life, including a transformation in the perception of the stereotyped roles of women (Toni & Olivier, 2004:194), which has impacted on emerging identities, since the process of identity construction in all societies is tied to historical moments (Freeman, 1993:161).

The changed role of women in South African society therefore necessitates reflection on the conceptualization of the identities of South African women. In this regard Magubane (in Agenda, 1997:17) asserts that since the issue of

identity has moved from the periphery of academic discourse to the centre, it is under rigorous debate. In focusing on this issue, it is necessary to deal with women from multiple perspectives since they occupy multiple spaces and complex positions and have to forge their identities (Kutin in Agenda, 1997: 22). Inherent ambiguities and contradictions exist when people are required to inhabit a space of multiplicity which, in a diverse society like South Africa, is characterised by comfort with ambiguity, dissonance, hybridity and difference (Mama, 1995).

This background provided the theoretical framework in which the study was placed. A postmodernist view of identity suggests multiple selves (Steyn & Hay, 1999:121) or a plurality of identities (Calhoun, 1994). Korf (1998:90) also emphasises that most contemporary theorists subscribe to the principle of multiple identities. The latter view is also supported by Wasserman and Jacobs (2003:115) in their assertion that no identity is static and that the expression of one form of identity does not negate the expression of another. According to McNamee (in Grodin & Lindlof, 1996:149) from a postmodernist perspective identities, including career identities, are viewed as realities constructed in the interactive moment. Wasserman and Jacobs (2003:126) further explain that different elements of identity are adopted and adapted as both exogenous and endogenous elements of society develop. In this regard since coloured identities are hybrid, they are constantly in the making or in a state of flux. The identities adopted by coloureds are fundamentally linked to their unique experiences as a population group in South Africa.

A major challenge in identity development during adolescence, according to Ackerman and Botha (1997:180) and Steenkamp (1992:21), is the development and acquisition of a career identity. However, since each individual belongs to a specific cultural group, his or her identity construction takes place within this social context through interaction with others. According to Erikson (1968), this process therefore involves a relative unique integration of both intra-psychic and socio-historical aspects into the person's developing personality. For the adolescent of colour in this regard, according to Botha and Ackerman (1997:72), the development of a career identity is a complex process. Urbanisation and westernisation, which have led *inter alia* to the disruption and erosion of traditional values, norms and social structures, further complicate the career identity development process. One result of change in the SA political context, however, as expressed by Stead (1996:270) is that career development may change for South Africans, since conceptions based on the social order of the apartheid era are increasingly being replaced by dynamic, new ideas.

In the career domain Botha and Ackerman (1997:72) identify James Marcia's classification of identity statuses as an appropriate model. According to this model a person is classified according to his or her status of identity development, based on the presence or absence of a period of decision-making (crisis), and the degree of personal commitment, where crisis refers to a period of decision-making characterised by the active and conscious exploration and

consideration of alternative options, and commitment refers to taking a firm and relatively permanent decision, and implementing it appropriately. The extent to which adolescents experience crises in the choice of a career and the extent to which they commit themselves to their career choice determine their status in the development of a career identity. Career identity achievement refers to the adolescent who has experienced a period of active exploration and consideration of career options, and has committed him/herself relatively permanently to a specific career. Career moratorium indicates that the adolescent is in the process of exploration of the self and the professional world, but has not yet made any commitment. In the foreclosure status, the options are not effectively explored, but a career is chosen — often due to parental pressure. Diffusion of career identity occurs when adolescents have not made any effort to actively explore a career, or made any career commitments.

Identity development (including career identity) during periods of social and political transformation in reality needs to be researched in order to understand the influence of such changes on the relationship between the individual in this study, a first-year female coloured student, and the way she adapts to the demands of a changing job market. Moosa, Moonsamy and Fridjon (1997:258) deplore the scarcity of empirical investigation into the psychological impact on people of colour and their responses to the historical and socio-cultural context of South Africa. Although the multicultural and economic contexts of South Africa are important factors in understanding career development, they have received scant attention in South African literature (Stead & Watson, 1998:290). Stevens and Lockhat (1997:254) suggest that ongoing research be conducted and more appropriate theoretical models be developed to understand adolescents' responses to the long-term impact of transitions and their broader needs.

In this study we explored and described the career identities of first-year female coloured students from an educational psychological and psycho-sociological perspective against the background of the changed role and position of women in post-apartheid South African society. We did not propose, however, to address the whole complex nature of identity construction in SA society, but merely wished to contribute to an understanding of the career identities of first-year female coloured students in South Africa.

Problem statement and objectives of the study

This research — being part of an inter-institutional research project studying emerging identities of first-year female students at Eastern Cape higher education institutions — focused only on the career identities of South African first-year female coloured students. The primary research question can be stated as:

> What is the content of the career identities of South African first-year female coloured students at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape in post-apartheid South-Africa?

The secondary question can be formulated as:

Which guidelines can be produced to facilitate a climate in which a positive career identity can be constructed?

The primary objective of this study was to reflect on South African first-year female coloured students' career identity, at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape, in a changing society. The secondary objective was to recommend guidelines to facilitate a climate for positive career identity construction in these first-year students.

Working definitions

Identity

Toni and Olivier (2004:195) and the International Bureau of Education (1998: 7) define identity as referring to the cognitive meaning people attach to themselves; the answer they provide to the question "Who am I?" provides an indication of the distinction they make between themselves and others.

Career identity

In line with the above definition, Botha and Ackerman (1997:72) explain that, in adolescents' quests for career identities, they must find answers to the questions "What can I do?" and "What shall I do?" Botha and Ackerman (1997:72) cite Holland, Gottfredson and Power's definition, which describes career identity as "...the possession of a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests and talents". Career identity therefore includes various facets of identity development, *inter alia*, knowledge of self regarding abilities, interests, aptitude, objectives and personal values, and the actualisation of these facets.

Gouws and Kruger (1994:88) explain that where young children usually base their career choices on what they are familiar with, or on fantasies (policeman, doctor, teacher, ballet dancer, astronaut, etc.), adolescents begin to form an increasingly realistic conception of their own abilities and interests, with the result that their career interests also become gradually more realistic. These authors contend that the acquisition of a career identity takes place in two phases. During the first phase, which lasts from approximately 14 to 18 years of age, the adolescent begins to think in broad categories of work, without taking any definite decisions. This is referred to as the crystallisation phase, since adolescents begin to form ideas about careers and gather information about various career categories. In the second or specification phase, the adolescent's choices are narrowed down increasingly to more specific careers. By the end of this period, which extends from approximately 18 to 21 years of age, the adolescent has usually chosen a career that forms an important part of his or her identity.

Coloured

According to Wasserman and Jacobs (2003:73) there is no consistency in post-apartheid terminology but, generally, academic and journalistic discourses use the term "coloured" by itself, with or without quotation marks, or with a regional designation, like Cape coloured, in order to indicate a distinct local culture.

Coloured people are sometimes described as "persons of mixed racial

ancestry" (Stead, 1996:270; Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999:170) or an "in-between race" (Soudien, 1998:95). However, Du Pré (1994:3) refers to the Population Registration Act (No. 30 of 1950), which defines a coloured negatively, namely, as one who is not white (european) and not Bantu (the term Bantu has since been replaced in law by the term black). It further divides coloured people into seven groups, i.e. Cape coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, other Asiatic, and other coloured groups.

Du Pré (1994:10) points out that since the abolition of racial classification in 1991 many writers have had a problem with the use of the word "coloured" and many have resorted to using "coloured" while at the same time advancing the explanation that reference to "coloured" people is merely an indication that such people are of mixed ancestry and nothing else. However, the term "coloured" was always offensive to people thus classified, and, above all, carries the stigma of inferiority.

Erasmus and Pieterse (1999:183) are of the opinion that coloured identities have been shaped by very particular racist discourses. It is important to conceptualise coloured identities as relational identities shaped by a complex network of concrete social relations rather than characterising them as a particular category of individuals and/or as simply an imposed name from a racist past. The value of this approach is its challenge to any notion of colouredness as homogeneous and/or an essentialist ethnic identity with fixed cultural boundaries as well as its acknowledgement of the particularity of identities.

Adolescence
The term adolescence refers to the transition from childhood to adulthood and is derived from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning "to grow towards adulthood" (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:3). A distinction can be drawn between early adolescence, including puberty (12 to14 years), middle adolescence (15 to17 years), and late adolescence (18 to approximately 21 years) (http://www.ask doctormarla.com). For the purposes of this study, first-year students in the age range of 18 to 22 years were considered as late adolescents.

Research design
A qualitative, explorative, interpretive, descriptive and contextual research design was used (Mouton, 1996:103-169) to research emerging career identities of female first-year coloured students at a higher education institution in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Research method
In order to explore and describe the students' perceptions with regard to their career identities, the following steps were taken:

Sample
Participants were purposively selected according to specific criteria such as

age, gender, year of study, and race (Creswell, 1994; De Vos, 1998). They were South African first-year female coloured students between the ages of 18 and 22 years, with an average age of 19.3 years. All 40 participants were from the Eastern Cape and were studying at the Vista Campus of the now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Data collection

Data were collected during six focus group interview sessions. Focus group interviews may be described as "a purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between individuals with a similar background and common interests" (Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998:314). This method of data-gathering was therefore deemed appropriate to elicit information on the topic under investigation. Each group consisted of between six to eight participants. One open-ended research question was posed to the participants to acquire information on the topic, namely: "How do you see yourself (as a female) in terms of your future career in a changing/transforming society?" The interview sessions continued until definite patterns or themes emerged and the information became saturated (De Vos, 1998). Two researchers participated in each group: one acted as the facilitator and the other as the observer, recording field notes to ensure that triangulation was effected (Vockell & Asher, 1995:201-205; De Vos, 1998).

Ethical measures

The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the research study. They were selected because they identified themselves as coloured, not as Xhosa, white or Asian. In the selection and identification process the researchers gave careful consideration to cultural and individual differences and sensitivity among first-year students, such as gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status. They could decline to participate and were allowed to withdraw from the research at any stage without the threat of negative consequences. Informed consent was required from the participants and confidentiality was consistently ensured. No erroneous information was provided to the participants nor was any information withheld from them.

Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were coded by means of Tesch's descriptive analysis technique (Creswell, 1994:154-155). This involved clustering similar topics together. After the most suitable description was identified for these topics, they were divided into categories. The list of categories was reduced by grouping related topics together into themes. Four themes emerged.

An independent qualitative researcher recoded the data in order to determine whether the same themes emerged and could be confirmed. A consensus discussion took place to establish agreement on the identified central themes and sub-themes, which are represented in Table 1.

Table 1   Career identities of South African first-year female coloured students

Theme 1: Their perspectives on career issues
- Awareness of increasing career opportunities and choices
- Women have more bargaining power
- Women of other race groups also involved
- New career choices

Theme 2: The participants' characteristics of self-knowledge
- Independence
- Confidence
- Goal directedness
- Working hard
- Ambition

Theme 3: Factors that influenced their career identities and career choices
- Social consciousness
- Availability of information
- Role models in their lives
- The importance of monetary gain and social status
- Lack of guidance with regard to subject choices at school
- Financial constraints
- To fulfill self-actualization

Theme 4: Concerns regarding the development of their careers
- They experienced dual role conflicts
- Cultural values cannot be ignored
- Still living in a predominantly male world
- Fear of possible unemployment

The results obtained from the focus group interviews were used as the basis for generating guidelines and strategies in the form of recommendations for higher education institutions and other relevant parties.

Trustworthiness

Guba's model for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was applied in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability received special attention.

A literature control was undertaken to validate the findings. The research results were compared with the results of previous studies in order to determine similarities, differences, gaps and unique contributions of these results (Poggenpoel, 1993). Since coloureds and Indians are nowadays seen as part of the black population of South Africa (Toni & Olivier, 2004:195), literature referring to blacks formed part of the literature control.

Since this study was qualitative in nature, it did not aim to generalize its findings, as it was a small-scale study of the career identities of a group of adolescent female coloured students at a historically black university campus.

Results, discussion and recontextualisation
The four themes that emerged elucidated the content of the career identities of South African first-year female coloured students at the participating higher education institution in a post-apartheid and changing society (see Table 1).

Results
The results revealed, firstly, the participants' acute awareness of their increasing career opportunities, as well as a wide range of new career possibilities. They believed that they were in a better career situation now than their counterparts had been during the apartheid era, and that all South Africa women could benefit from the change to democracy. Secondly, the participants showed remarkable self-knowledge relating to their career identities including independence, confidence and purposefulness. Although they had high ambitions and ideals, the participants were fully aware that they would have to work very hard to realise their dreams. Thirdly, the participating first-year students felt that their career identities and choices were influenced by factors such as their views on social consciousness, the availability of career-related information and career guidance at school, the role of significant people in their lives, some financial constraints while studying, self motivation and the influence of social status and financial independence linked to specific careers. In the final instance, the participants expressed concern that their careers could be delayed by their experience of a dual-role conflict, the influences of a male-dominated world and their cultural heritage, as well as the reality of possible unemployment.

The results are discussed, using Table 1 as reference.

Theme 1: Their perspectives on career issues
Because it is only a decade since a non-racial democracy emerged in South Africa, the labour market and career opportunities are only starting to open up for young coloured females. One participant in this investigation was of the opinion that "*South Africa has changed only a little bit ... but it is still growing* [sic]".

It was clear from the following identified sub-themes, with regard to their perspectives on career issues, that the first-year female coloured students had well established career identities:

•   Awareness of increasing career opportunities and choices available
The participating students felt that they had access to more and different career opportunities. They expressed their views as follows:

"*... since 1994, many doors have opened for us*"
"*... in a changing society, there will be more matriculants who go to university and study computers*"
"*Earlier, there were two choices: nursing and teaching ...*"
(previously) "*There were only a few career choices open to them*" (women).

These findings were in line with Stead and Watson's (1998:293) views that the choices and challenges of career development will become increasingly important as South Africa transforms itself and adapts to the new political dispensation. Stead (1996:270) also emphasises that socio-political changes highlight a dynamic interaction between the career development of individuals and the contextual factors surrounding them.

• Women have more bargaining power

The participants believed that women were generally in a better career position than previously. Two respondents stated:

"*The women have more power now*" and

"*I see myself as someone successful, powerful* [sic]"

This corresponds with Castells's observation (1997:173) that the incorporation of women into the labour market and into paid work has important consequences in that as a woman's financial contribution to the household budget becomes indispensable, her bargaining power in the household increases significantly.

• Women of other race groups also involved

The participating coloured students in this investigation were of the opinion that women of other race groups also benefited from the changes in post-apartheid South Africa. One participant said:

"... *a wide variety of women ... especially blacks*, (have profited) ..."

In addition, Gaganakis (1999:148) established that, since 1994, female students have begun to outnumber male students for the first time at undergraduate level. There is ethnic variation in this category, for example, the female members of Tswana households are the most literate of all black ethnic groups.

• New career choices

In this category, a number of career fields chosen by the participants emerged that differed from those traditionally selected by coloured girls and included: chartered accountant, entrepreneur, medical doctor, biological scientist, economist and psychologist. Careers in marketing, computer science, management and statistics were also identified as popular choices.

This was in line with the prediction of Ackerman and Botha (1997:180) that the rapidly changing socio-political situation in South Africa will expand the range of job opportunities available for women.

Gaganakis's (2003:282) study of adolescent black school-going females identified that the girls express a highly individualistic spirit — self-centred, free and independent — and aspired mainly to traditionally male-dominated positions. Their occupational choice was generally either individualist orientated (e.g. engineer, accountant, business woman, lawyer and advertising executive) or community orientated (e.g. psychologist, working with children, and social worker).

Theme 2: The participants' characteristics of self-knowledge
Self-knowledge among first-year female coloured students is important, so that they are able to stabilise their career identity. The identified sub-themes indicated here revealed that the participants displayed a great sense of self-knowledge. For instance, some mentioned

"*I've got the personality for it and also problem-solving skills*", and
"*My knowledge of myself ... like speaking to people ... and to smile a lot* [sic]"

The sub-themes included the following characteristics, as supported by quotations:

• Independence
"*I think women must be independent*"
"*I have to be my own person*"
"*I want to have my own money* (financial independence). *I don't want to ask someone for money*"

Braungart and Braungart (1995:80) found in their study that women were especially concerned that a lack of education would make them dependent on others. A factor that exacerbated their fear was that women in formal employment always earned considerably less than similarly employed males. These authors found that women viewed education as the key to their personal advancement and security. Similarly, Gaganakis (2003:283) found that adolescents viewed academic qualifications as highly valuable as a means of exchange on the labour market and as an escape from traditional black working class female work.

• Confidence
"*I feel confident. I know I can do quite a lot and achieve a lot*"
"*I know that I can do it ... so that knowledge motivates me to go on*"

In her study, Campbell (1995b:166) also found that women were generally enthusiastic and hopeful that they would succeed in their quest for higher education, which would give them access to personal, family and community advancement.

• Goal directedness
"*I know how to achieve my goal*"
"*... prioritise and plan your career path*"

Similarly, students in Braungart and Braungart's (1995:80) study listed personal goals, such as success, happiness and attaining a leadership position in their country as being significant. Myburgh, Grobler and Niehaus (1999: 177) emphasise that educators should help learners to evaluate their scholastic performances realistically, to set achievable goals, and to praise themselves and others, while Mokgathle and Schoeman (1998:33) agree that women believe in their ability to pursue their goals and realize their potential.

- Working hard

   "*… being honest and hardworking*"

   "*I'll be studying further … towards my honours*"

Students participating in a study conducted by the Braungarts (1995:80) expressed the hope that they would be able to complete their university degrees, perhaps attend graduate or professional school, and do well academically.

- Ambition

   "*I want to go on to the Masters*"

   "*I want to be somewhere at the top to proof* [sic] *to the men out there that we can also do it*"

Campbell (1995a:156) concurs that education is regarded as the key to a bright future, as it leads to an improvement in the quality of life and provides opportunities for enhanced self-esteem. The hope for educational success is thus closely linked to the possibility of pursuing a 'professional career'. Likewise, Braungart and Braungart (1995:84) found that black students' aspirations reflect the desire for upward mobility and that they pin their family resources and hopes on education as a vehicle to greater personal opportunities.

When examining research undertaken in America on the vocational development of black youths, Hickson and White (1989:78) found, however, that although these black youths had high aspirations, they tended to have a negative self-image and poor expectations of achieving their occupational goals.

Theme 3: Factors that influenced their career identities and career choices

Ackerman and Botha (1997:180) are of the opinion that when people are confronted with alternatives in making choices, factors such as external social influences, and the cultural environment in which they are located, as well as their struggle to come to terms with the options available to them, account for their preference towards a specific occupational stream.

Similarly, the participants in this study listed a number of factors that contributed towards their career choice:

- Social consciousness

A mature viewpoint was expressed by participants as

   "*We must at least get a chance to change society*"

   "*I feel I would like to contribute to change*"

   "*I'd like to be a role model to most of the kids in my family*"

The above quotations concur with Braungart and Braungart's (1995:85; 80) finding that the black student respondents in their research were especially willing to personally work for social and political reform. They regarded a university degree as providing them with the necessary credentials to be influential in, and helpful to, society. The same sentiment was expressed by a female respondent in Davidson's (1996:94) investigation who said: "I want to help teenagers. Do social work. Try to help if they have problems, help them

in some way." Freeman (1993:164) expresses the view that the youth can be a major political and social force. If the South African youth are to play a positive and productive role in future, their energies will need to be harnessed to social reconstruction in much the same way that their vitality was harnessed against apartheid.

• Availability of information

To the same extent that self-knowledge is important in a career choice, occupational knowledge is of equal significance. From the quotations below, it was clear that the respondents in this study desired and actively sought information on career issues.

"... *you don't just go and do something ... find out first*"

"*I looked into other careers as well ... you don't just go and do anything*"

This finding is important and was contradictory to the earlier findings of Freeman (1993:164) that black youth under apartheid rule were badly deprived of resources and knowledge, and unless interactional education around issues that fundamentally affect them, like work opportunities, were offered, they did not realise their full potential. Similarly, where the adolescents in the investigation of Hickson and White (1989:78) experienced a personal "career identity" as a meaningless concept, the participants in this project had rather well-developed career identities.

• Role models in their lives

The role of educators and other significant adults in the career identity formation of adolescents cannot be underestimated, as indicated by the following quotations by some of the participants:

"... *my class teacher at school ... she motivate* [sic] *me a lot ... my parents as well*"

"... *Oprah Winfrey*"

The study of Vorster and Sutcliffe (2000:15) confirmed the increasing value attached to educators' relationships with their learners in identity formation, considering the frequent disruption of the parental unit. Similarly, in a study of Myburgh and Anders (1989:123) it emerged that black high-school learners placed a very high premium on the opinion of their teachers. A survey undertaken among metropolitan black youths by Van der Reis (1997:8) established that they aspired to be like their heroes: educated, successful, prosperous and living in a beautiful home with a spouse and two or, at the most, three children.

However, in examining research undertaken in America on the vocational development of black youth, Hickson and White (1989:78) found that the average black may lack positive work role models. Gaganakis (1999:151; 2003:286) contends that the mother's work experience is the most significant variable affecting an adolescent's choice. Fathers associated with the public sphere and the outside world and who can provide powerful and positive role models are generally absent.

•   The importance of monetary gain and social status

Participants presented varying pictures of the importance of earning a high salary and higher social status, as supported by the following quotations:

> "*People make a huge fuss of being a doctor ... life style and all that, but at the end money does not mean everything*"
>
> "*I don't think social status is important*"
>
> "*... want to try to break the cycle of poverty and get out of it*"

The last view is specifically echoed by Botha and Ackerman (1997:72) when they report that an economically disadvantaged position encouraged the adolescent to choose a career which holds promise of financial independence, while Gaganakis (1999:148) confirms that teaching and nursing, the so-called traditionally "women's jobs", have given black women in particular access to relatively high status jobs. Moosa *et al.* (1997:256) cite Bulhan who describes a group of Africans he calls the intelligentsia, as those who have attained a distinctive status and privilege through their acquisition of western education.

One of the students in Davidson's (1996:94) study ascribed her drive for academic success to her fear of facing the economic difficulties and limited occupational opportunities friends and family members have experienced, as well as her familial expectations.

•   Lack of guidance with regard to subject choices at school

Botha and Ackerman (1997:72) are of the opinion that black adolescents presently have to make decisions on matters for which they are probably not well prepared. The following quotations by two participants supported this view:

> "*... because at school, I didn't do Accounting*"
>
> "*IT* (computer programming) *is in demand*"

•   Financial constraints

One of the participants felt that

> "*... there are certain things holding us back ... financial problems*"

Black students studied by Braungart and Braungart (1995:81) also expressed the view that financial problems would hamper their education and, subsequently, their ability to support themselves or their families.

•   To fulfill self-actualization

For some participants self-actualisation was important, and therefore they expressed a need to experience job satisfaction and to pursue their interests, as indicated by the following viewpoints:

> "*You must be happy in what you're doing*"
>
> "*I've always loved Accounting*"

The necessity of a well-developed career identity in self-actualization is supported by McIntosh (2000:626), who contends that it is necessary for individuals to develop both a healthy personal identity and a positive career identity. The development of these interrelated aspects of the self is a continual process of self exploration, vocational exploration and the integration of the

knowledge gained in such explorations. Successful life career development leads to individuals who are able to integrate their roles, their identity, and their work to establish a life that is rich in personal meaning, grounded in the community and deeply rewarding.

Braungart and Braungart (1995:84) found that students participating in their research recognised that the realisation of their personal dreams and aspirations hinged on whether the new South Africa would achieve political stability, economic growth and social equality.

Freeman (1993:164) concurs that, for many South African youth, identity has been very closely linked to the liberation struggle. This has limited their opportunities for the exploration of certain dimensions of themselves and for the necessary psychological preparation for a changing and demanding environment.

Theme 4: Concerns regarding the development of their careers

The participants were concerned about the development of their careers. The following sub-themes were identified in this regard:

• They experienced dual-role conflicts

The first-year coloured students involved in this study had different opinions regarding the dual role of women, as indicated by the following quotations:

"… *to have my own kids, my own house* …"

"… *you have to wear many caps on one head … be a mother, be a lover, be a manager, be a house wife, you have to manage the household* …"

"*If you think about the husband and the children first, you won't get the opportunity* …"

Literature also reflects these disparate views. On the one hand, Gaganakis (1999:148), for example, found that for the most part girls' subject choices in vocation and training reflected their expectations of a role in society that confirmed their place in the home and the family situation. On the other hand, several women who participated in a research project of Braungart and Braungart (1995:81) stated that they were afraid of getting married or being in a miserable marriage with a 'bad' or 'irresponsible' husband.

A study of Van der Reis (1997:8) revealed that modern South African metropolitan blacks believe in their right to choose a marriage partner without consulting their parents. Furthermore, they are essentially 'modern' in their approach to marriage and the status of women. Nearly all favour monogamy and the sharing of household chores by both husband and wife, as well as gender equality with regard to educational and job advancement opportunities. Young women in particular seem to feel a need to escape their traditional role and to have the freedom to make their own decisions.

• Cultural values cannot be ignored

Concerning cultural values, the participants responded as follows:

"… *you can't run away from the way you were raised*"

"*Our parents believe that a woman's place is with your husband*"

"… *independent we have our own lives, so you may think apart* [sic] *from your parents*"

Myburgh, Grobler and Niehaus (1999:178) are of the opinion that the role of students' background variables should not be underestimated or ignored in efforts to predict and explain their scholastic achievement. Myburgh and Anders (1989:124) explain that each individual is born into a specific culture; with the parents as the 'first' representatives of a specific culture group. One can expect that a positive identification with the parents may ultimately lead to a positive identification with the values adhered to by the specific cultural group. Parents are therefore indispensable in the identity formation of adolescents.

However, Ramphele (1992:15) points out that the increased power and control that adolescents obtained during the struggle years from organising and participating in, for example, consumer and school boycotts, has heightened the current level of conflict between parents and children. Adolescents are now aggressively challenging many traditional values held by their parents.

• Still living in a predominantly male world

The following were some of the participants' reflections regarding women's traditionally subordinate roles to men:

"*A man thinks he owns you*"

"*Men have more power than us*"

According to the Department of Education (1997:8), although attitudes are changing South African society is still very patriarchal and discriminatory. Women are still typically viewed as second-class citizens, subservient to men and in need of protection. Their social role is, by and large, defined through motherhood and homemaking. Although the girls in Gaganakis's (2003:285) study expressed an acute awareness of the prevailing imbalances in gender relations, they were pessimistic about the possibility of changing these structures and social practices.

Gaganakis (1999:148) identified the following mechanisms that inhibit female achievement: male bias in text books and in extra-curricular activities; men's dominance of authority positions; sexual harassment, and "gender panic". This "panic" refers to girls' loss of confidence in their ability to succeed or their fear of social ostracism by males if they are perceived to be too clever.

• Fear of possible unemployment

A major concern among participants was the fear that their lack of experience in the job market could result in their possible unemployment:

"*My problem is why* [sic] *people always ask for a person with experience, I know you must have experience, but I believe that the person without experience, with a qualification, can do the job better…*"

"*… finish varsity and then there are no jobs out there*"

Lankard (1996:1) observed that, although it may seem unfair to a student who has worked hard, it should not be a surprise that employers value expe-

rienced workers. Experience is integral to knowing and understanding oneself and how one relates to different situations, circumstances and roles.

Naicker (1994:33) warns that most young people entering the workforce will change jobs about four or five times. They will experience varying spells of unemployment and sub-employment and will soon realize that educational qualifications lose their value in a shrinking job market.

Hickson and White (1989:80) are of the opinion that if an individual does not perceive occupational options as viable realities, then obviously there will not be exploration and investigation of these options in relation to oneself.

Behr (1987:2) found that since American college and university graduates are experiencing more difficulty in finding jobs, it has become necessary to assist them with career planning and/or career choice, while in the UK career education courses now also cover the issue of unemployment, while counselling includes various forms of voluntary and community action to provide alternatives to employment.

A survey conducted by the HSRC (1998:5) showed that 84% of graduates managed to find jobs within the first year after graduation. A lack of experience within the specific field of study was indicated by these graduates as one of the main reasons for experiencing difficulty in securing employment.

On the other hand, some of the participants felt that in spite of their qualifications they might not get jobs due to oversupply in certain job areas. They expressed their fear as follows:

"... (computer training) *is what they* (employers) *demand*"
but there may be
"... *too many employees for computers*".

In a survey undertaken by the HSRC (1998:5), too few positions within the specific field of study were indicated as one of the main reasons why graduates experienced difficulty in securing employment within one year after graduating.

Recommendations

The second research question in this study sought to establish which guidelines could be produced to facilitate a climate in which a positive career identity could be constructed.

In order for the first-year female coloured student to be better prepared to select a career from the wider spectrum of options now available to her, and to know herself better, the following are recommended:

Empower female learners

Educators should become more sensitive to the needs of their learners and should increasingly teach in such a way that every classroom situation in any subject prepares learners for life. In this regard, creating opportunities for the adequate formation and establishment of female learners' career identities is essential. Educators can be instrumental in facilitating career exploration by sponsoring career fairs, inviting female role models to address learners, or establishing mentor programmes for adolescent girls. Greater access to elec-

tronic media, especially informational software packages on different career choices, could assist female learners in making informed subject and career choices, especially since so many new careers are now accessible to them. Educators must reflect on their guidance and counselling functions in schools so that they can better support the formation of learners' career identities.

Redress the imbalances of services and resources

If human resources in the future South African society are to be developed and utilized to the maximum, it is crucial that psychological services, such as career guidance programmes and vocational counselling in schools, address the needs of the disadvantaged sections of the population, and not only those of the privileged. It is therefore necessary to not only question the imbalances of services and resources between these two groups, but also critically examine the current practices and assumptions on which career counselling in schools is based (Naicker, 1994:27; Hickson & White, 1989:77).

Introduce effective career development programmes

Considering the lack of effective guidance and counselling in the past, there is an urgent need for effective career development programmes in both primary and secondary schools, focusing on aspects such as self-knowledge, effective decision-making skills, the ability to integrate relevant information for application in decision-making processes, and career planning skills and strategies to implement decisions. According to Botha and Ackerman (1997: 74) these processes are of particular significance to adolescents from communities that experienced limited exposure to the "career world" in the broader context in the past. It also calls for stronger emphasis on other life skills, such as decision-making skills and various aspects of personal self-actualisation.

To address the factors that influenced the first-year female coloured students' career identities and career choices and their concerns regarding the development of their careers, the following guidelines are recommended:

Revisiting first-year orientation programmes

Although at the time of entry to university, decisions on career choices have generally already been taken, Behr (1987:2) established that in the Americas, where career counselling in secondary schools is highly developed, more than half of all first-year students entering universities needed assistance with career planning and/or career choice. It is therefore essential that South African first-year female students, especially coloured students of which a large percentage are from previously disadvantaged schools, should receive career guidance before registration or at the beginning of their studies so that their interests, aptitudes and motivation can be properly assessed in order to recommend appropriate courses and programmes. For the rest, student counselling should focus on student development and academic support. This could include life skills programmes to acquire goal setting, self-awareness, decision-making and conflict-resolution skills. Incentives should be provided to those who attend such programmes.

Gordon and Meyer (2002:42) are of the opinion that within the South African context, effective career development programmes should be compulsory in tertiary curricula, and all first-year students should receive career counselling before commencing their first academic year. Researchers appear to agree that the majority of individuals would benefit from career counselling, including those who have already decided on a career. However, it would appear that counselling is most advantageous when it is specific to the needs of an individual or a particular sub-group.

Training of career-guidance educators

In order to address the lack of thoroughly trained career-guidance educators in schools, universities and training agencies will have to adapt or introduce relevant modules or courses that will facilitate transformation in the training of sufficient numbers of these educators. Furthermore, with the introduction of inclusive education in South African schools, the Department of Education (DOE) will have to focus on the re-training of the limited number of guidance counsellors and advisors available at the educational aid centres in order to equip them to meet the specific social, career development and educational needs of, especially, disadvantaged learners. Funding for the career-guidance training of educators in previously disadvantaged schools must also be considered and prioritised by the DOE.

A new identity in South African career psychology

A search for a new identity in South African career psychology needs to be undertaken. According to Stead and Watson (1998:296-297) such an identity should not be divorced from western psychology but should be intimately linked to the socio-cultural milieu in South Africa and local career issues, such as unemployment, economic factors, career barriers, the transition from school to work, and the role of culture in career choice.

Conclusion

In this article we focused on the influence of transformation on the career identities of female coloured adolescents in post-apartheid South Africa. Changes in coloured culture and career identities cannot be solely attributed to the changes that have taken place since 1994, since the apartheid years have left a deep scar on the coloured community. However, it can be concluded that during the post-apartheid era changes have gained momentum. It is also clear that the career identities of the coloured community cannot be separated from the political dispensation in the country.

This article also offered some guidelines to facilitate a climate for positive career identity construction among first-year female coloured students and in general. Hopefully, these will contribute to the successful acquisition of career identities by coloured female adolescents and will lead to a joyful, fulfilling and gratifying career in later life.

Acknowledgements

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