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Environmental, Personal and Professional Future Representations

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Abstract

Students believed to be efficacious in coping with complex events and they are positively committed into their actual project. Despite a positive representation of own future, they expected to find a satisfying job only in a medium term (5 years). This expectation could be related to a territory representation as a limit rather than a chance. Women, compared to male, have better expectations in relation to the representation of their future. Students of Mathematical sciences showed a more negative representation of their future, and they expected to need more time to find a satisfying job compared to other students.

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1. Theoretical background

Bauman (2000) used Liquid society metaphor to depict the transition from a rigid and ordered social system to a flexible, dynamic, uncertain, and accelerated society (Bauman, 2000; Clegg, & Baumeler, 2010; Gabriel, 2005; Larson 2002). This transition has required a change of organizational contexts, job market, job skills and competences (Wilpert, 2009). Furthermore, this transition affected subjective and cultural dimension, and now, more than in the past, people have to manage a new flexible and complex reality (Grimaldi, 2007; La Rosa & Gosetti, 2005). It has emerged a new complex challenge for new generations, which have to be able to represent their social and professional future within a social context affected by constant and unexpected changes (Castiglione, Licciardello, Mauceri, & Rampullo, 2012; Licciardello, De Caroli, Castiglione, & Marletta, 2007). Furthermore,

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representation of own environment, and several intrapersonal and contextual factors affects own professional orientation in terms of career and expectations about own career path (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Intrapersonal factors, like Self Efficacy, affects professional orientation, expectation about own professional future, performance and representation of own environment (Bandura, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2001; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001).

Expectations about own professional future may regard to both about objective (e.g. salary) and subjective (e.g. work needs and values) outcomes of professional activities (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994; Lent, 2005). Considering both subjective and objective outcomes is consistent with a work's representation as a way to satisfy both basic needs (instrumental value) and self-realization (intrinsic value) needs (Blustein, 2001; Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Sarchielli, 2003). According to this, future possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Marshall et al., 2011) represent what one might would become are linked to life planning and showed a motivational function. Expectations about own future showed to play an important role into life and work projectuality. (Cross & Markus, 1991; Marshall, 2002; Packard & Nguyen, 2003; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). On the other hand professional orientation, and especially personal goals have a motivational function. The motivational function of goals relies on determination to achieve that specific goal, whereas without commitment it loses its motivational feature (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005; Jostmann & Koole, 2009; Locke & Latham, 1990; Oettingen et al., 2009).

Lastly some factors like predispositions, gender and major area, seemed to have a role in professional orientation, expectations about own future, work representations and environmental representation (Castiglione et al., 2012; Falanga, De Caroli, & Sagone, 2014; Lent et al., 1994; Lent, 2005; Sanchez, & Licciardello, 2012). Gender affects value system, women showed to be more expressive and relational than men, whereas men seemed to be more agentic and instrumental (Castiglione, Rampullo, & Licciardello, 2014; Schwarts & Rubel, 2005). Although gender differences were often minimal and affected by own cultural context (Schwarts & Rubel, 2005), they emerged with regard to students professional orientation too. Women, compared to men, have lesser expectations to achieve positive outcomes in different job positions, especially when these ones are linked culturally and stereotypically to male domains (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Betz & Hackett, 1981; Brodzinski, Scherer, & Wiebe, 1990; Eccles, 1994; Castiglione, Licciardello, Sánchez, Rampullo, & Campione, 2013).

Within this framework, it is fundamental how one perceives own environment. Several authors does not conceptualize environment dimension as ab objective fact, but they considered it rather as a psychosocial construct (Lent et al., 1994; Licciardello & Damigella, 2014; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Furthermore, the elements that can support or hinder own professional future, and own career path, may be both environmental (e.g. discriminations) and intrapersonal (e.g. Self) factors (Lent et al., 1994; Swanson & Woitke, 1997).

2. Overview of the current study

In line with a vison of a mutual relationship between the person and his environment, the aim of this study was to explore how gender and major area of study affects student's: personal factors, in terms of coping self-efficacy and commitment to a specific project; expectations about own personal and professional future representation (in terms of possible Future Self, job needs, work representation and expectations); representation of own environment; and their general professional orientation.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of University of Catania students (N=493; Men=166, Women=327) with a mean age of 23.5 (SD=2.74, range 19-36).

3.2. Measures

Personal factors. Personal factors were measured by two scales. We used the Self-efficacy in Management of complex problems scale (Farnese, Avallone, Pepe, & Pocelli, 2007) to measure coping efficacy. The measure is