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**THE ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM
IN THE REALISTIC CHOICE OF CARRIER**

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Abstract

Starting from the most accepted definitions of self-esteem, which include the balance between satisfied needs and the set of needs felt, we believe that career orientation and the option of choosing it can be strongly determined by a person's achievements and expectations. However, social factors that pertain to the way an individual is perceived by others, as well as the comparison that the subject carries out between himself and other individuals significant for himself, determine the structuring of a certain self-image, which, in turn, will influence the person's professional option. Thus, career decisions involve not only functions of thought, that ensure cognitive operation with relevant information and problem solving, but also affective, self-motivational and self-defining functions, which together determine the assumption of roles in personal and professional life. Career counselling mainly focuses on knowing personality traits, learning about occupations and labour market orientations, developing decision-making abilities and practicing career planning. Completing these activities with certain awareness raising approaches to self-efficacy and self-respect (which outlines self-esteem) can increase the chances of a realistic career choice. The study conducted intended to measure the level of self-esteem and the degree of self-assessment in relation to choosing the desired career, at the level of certain students included in a career counselling program, which included activities of self-knowledge and the development of self-esteem.

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1. Introduction

Self-esteem is a significant concept in areas such as social psychology, clinical psychology, personality psychology, development psychology, and so on. Self-esteem is a component of the concept of self that develops through individual life experiences but is also developed, to a large extent, by social comparisons from the perspective of efficiently fulfilled tasks and responsibilities. From the perspective of equilibrium theories, self-esteem is defined as a function of the relationship between satisfied needs and the set of needs felt. From the perspective of social comparison theories, self-esteem is the result of the comparison that the subject performs between himself and other individuals significant to himself.

Self-esteem is a stable feature of adults, which is why it is more difficult to have an objective picture of a person's self-image at the age of childhood or adolescence. Research on the characteristics and impact of self-esteem on human activity show that correct identification of the level of self-esteem can reveal multiple characteristics of a person, activity orientations and potential achievements or failures. A person will have a high self-esteem when his success is at least equal to or superior to his aspirations (James, 1890).

Self-esteem is a complex structure in which the cognitive component merges with the affective one, determining a positive/appreciative or negative/depreciative attitude of the individual towards oneself. A social component is added to the cognitive and affective component, because not only self-perception leads to the manifestation of a certain attitude towards oneself, but also social interactions with others and their assessments, which can mold the way a person values oneself. In reality, people need constant confirmation and reconfirmation of what they are and how they perceive themselves. However, the higher the self-esteem, relative to the affective component (tending to be higher), the less it is affected by situational characteristics, while in the case of low self-esteem, fluctuations and more frequent changes can be observed in relation to different situations.

Being such a complex structure, in connection with personality, self-esteem involves processes of identifying, internalizing and adapting/restructuring, which leads us to the idea that one can direct and develop those components of self-esteem through counselling activities, which will support endeavours of personal assertion in all areas of life, including professional life.

2. Problem Statement

The issue of self-esteem has been approached by various theoreticians who have been active in various fields of science (psychology, sociology, cultural philosophy), developing various theoretical models that explain the emergence and development of self-esteem. For example, William James makes a first reference from the perspective of scientific psychology on the concept of self-esteem in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). He defines self-esteem in close relation to the person's sense of competence, based on two aspects: the expectations and aspirations of the individual and the ability to achieve them. In this way, the success gained in the various fields of activity contributes to the increase of the level of self-esteem, while failure leads to the decrease of self-esteem (James, 1890).

From a perspective with interdisciplinary connotations of a psycho-socio-cultural nature, sociologist Morris Rosenberg analysed the concept of self-esteem by linking it to the feeling of self-validation and self-respect. Rosenberg developed an assessment tool for self-esteem, with the initial aim of measuring the

overall feeling of personal value and self-acceptance. This tool is also successfully used in current research on self-esteem, in the field of social sciences (Rosenberg, 1965).

Branden (1992) believes that self-esteem implies a sense of personal effectiveness (self-efficacy) and a sense of personal value (self-respect). Self-efficacy determines the degree of motivation, the initiative and perseverance in an activity, determining self-confidence and courage and activism in the achievement of objectives. Self-validation involves positive or negative attitudes towards one's own person, which affects the person's affective feelings and behaviour. Positive attitudes will create a sense of being valuable in the context of affirmation of personal needs and desires.

Epstein (2003) adds to the issues of self-esteem a cognitivist-experiential perspective in an integrative theory of personality, in which learning theories and cognitive theories are associated. He integrates self-esteem into the fundamental needs of man, believing that individuals aim at increasing self-esteem by processing information in relation to themselves and reality in a way that combines reason and experiential.

Representing a complex concept, self-esteem has also been analysed from the perspective of organizing its content. Thus, Sordes-Ader, Lévêque, Oubrayrie, & Safont-Mottay, (1998) identified five sub-dimensions of self-esteem, all with a major impact on the individual: 1. Emotional self - representing the individual in relation to self-control over emotions, allowing for better planning and organization in activities; 2. Social self - representing the interaction with others and the sense of social recognition; 3. Professional self - skills and professional or educational performance; 4. Physical self - own body image and perception of others regarding physical aspect and abilities; 5. The anticipatory self - the way the person is heading towards the future and the attitude towards what he anticipates regarding his life.

Researchers such as Marcic & Kobal Grum (2011) consider that self-esteem varies according to the person's gender. Girls and boys relate differently to one's own, which makes them present slightly different attitudes towards different aspects of reality, including those related to professional achievement. Cultivating self-esteem means helping young people develop their capacity to adapt to different social, personal or professional contexts through self-validation.

Therefore, in recent decades, the need to introduce the issue of self-image improvement into the counselling area is emphasized, appreciating that most aspects of life, such as personal values, attitudes towards one's own person and others, success in learning, decision-making, problem solving, options and professional success etc. relate to self-assessment and self-esteem (Mruk, 2006). Thus, a positive self-image can be perceived as a motivating force that guides individuals towards success and helps them maintain a high level of competence in the essential aspects of life.

At the same time, self-esteem must have an optimal level because neither a very high self-esteem, nor a very low esteem are desirable. When a person has a very high self-esteem, focusing only on the record of success in the field of activity, the person has a low degree of autonomy and learning, being unable to take risks. People with low self-esteem will not mobilize to demonstrate what they can achieve in their field of activity, setting limited goals or, in case of failure, becoming demoralized and anxious. These people will avoid challenges and opportunities because of fears that they will not be able to handle them (Crocker, 2002).

In the formative and evaluative/self-evaluative context of career counselling, it is increasingly necessary to initiate action plans, based on knowledge and self-knowledge, on the awareness of one's own qualities, aptitudes, values that can be identified in the self-image. As such, optimal professional choices must therefore be done in relation to self-image, self-efficacy and self-respect, so that each person can choose those career paths in which he/she can achieve the desired success.

3. Research Questions

The question at the foundation of this investigative approach was the following: to what extent does the involvement of students in a career counselling program, which includes, besides the specific training activities, professional orientation and a component devoted to awareness and development of self-esteem, favour realistic orientation towards a particular career?

In line with this question, the study premises were formulated as such:

- choices in relation to a particular career path are influenced not only by aptitudes and academic training but also by self-esteem. Very high self-esteem, as well as low self-esteem, can lead to erroneous choices in career choices that either lead to inefficiency or limit the possibilities of capitalizing one's own potential;

providing a career counselling program, where combining activities of self-knowledge of personality traits (including the level of self-esteem) with career guidance and planning activities, favours making the right choices for different career paths that will maximize the students' skills and qualities, ensuring success in socio-professional integration.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to create a counselling program that, through a combination of elements of career counselling and those of personal counselling (focusing on the development of self-esteem) can determine the realistic and optimal orientation of students towards a particular career by adjusting the level of self-esteem and self-assessment in relation to the intended career.

This counselling program focused on two subcomponents: 1. Career counselling and 2. Identifying and developing self-esteem.

The subcomponent that targeted career counselling focused on activities of:

- self-knowledge of personal characteristics and abilities;
- awareness of the approaches to the relation of personal qualities with the realization of a certain professional option;
- developing decision-making abilities related to career planning and the development of realistic career plans outlining short, medium and long-term goals;
- establishing alternatives in career decision making etc.

The subcomponent that focused on the identification and development of self-esteem focused on activities of:

- expressing the concepts of self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-criticism etc.;
- identifying the factors that influence the growth or decrease of self-esteem;

- identifying personal values, attitudes, motivations that underlie the fulfilment of the proposed personal goals and their own choices/decisions regarding the career;
 - setting personal and professional standards in accordance with their own potential and own interests, aspirations etc.;
 - identifying environmental influences in raising self-esteem;
 - recognizing one's own effectiveness;
 - increasing the degree of self-respect;
- awareness of the way in which the self-validation of assumptions regarding oneself (understood as important structural factors for the attitude and behavioural system, with a motivational function) are realized.

5. Research Methods

As a basic method of research, we used testing, using two evaluation tools: one for assessing the level of students' self-esteem (Rosenberg Scale) and the second for assessing the degree of self-esteem in relation to career choice (personally developed tool in correlation with some items of the Rosenberg Scale).

The items of the self-rating scale, in relation to career choice, aimed at highlighting the motivation (given by the exact knowledge of their own aspirations) for professional training, the unrestricted exploitation of vocational learning opportunities, the boldness to test knowledge and skills in various professional activities, decisional capacity and analysis of career alternatives, anticipation of possible consequences of the chosen career path, frequent establishment of medium and long term career goals, accepting the opinions and criticisms of others in relation to career choice and the need for validation by others in the endeavours of career choice.

I feel it is necessary to mention that these self-assessment tools have been managed both before and after implementing the career counselling program.

Our research involved a group of 62 students from the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, who were in the first and second years of study. Of these, 27 were boys and 35 were girls, all of them aged 19-26. These students were involved in the development of a complex program of practical skills training for integration in the labour market, component of an area of intervention aimed at correlating lifelong learning with the labour market (Stan, 2016). Since the project activities have been strictly linked to professional counselling, without emphasizing the personality aspects of self-esteem, we also included activities related to self-knowledge and the development of self-esteem in the effort to establish certain correlations between the realistic orientation towards a certain career and the degree of self-esteem development.

The study focused on the results of a first sequence of student career counseling through individual and group activities. In addition to these activities, we have also managed the two tools outlined above, the Rosenberg Scale to measure self-esteem and the Self-Esteem Rating Scale in relation to career choices, in order to obtain information that could establish a connection between realistic choice career and the level of self-esteem.

As a result of these approaches, the present study focused on how students can shape their professional options in accordance with their personal characteristics, including self-esteem.

6. Findings

The first step that preceded the implementation of the intervention program consisted of a comparative analysis of the students' results on the Rosenberg scale and the scale of evaluation of the degree of self-assessment in relation to career choices.

Table 01. Analysis of the relation between self-esteem and self-assessment in relation to career choice, before the implementation of the counselling program

Results related to self-esteem (according to the Rosenberg scale) and self-assessment in relation to career choice		Girls (nr. și %)		Boys (nr. și %)	
		Self-esteem	Self-assessment in relation to career choice	Self-esteem	Self-assessment in relation to career choice
Score	Low	10 (28.57%)	3 (8.57%)	6 (22.22%)	1 (3.70%)
	Medium	21 (60%)	21 (60%)	12 (44.44%)	18 (66.66%)
	High	4 (11.42%)	11 (31.42%)	9 (33.33%)	8 (29.62%)

The second step was to re-evaluate the scales of evaluation of self-esteem and self-assessment in relation to career choices, after implementing the program of career counseling and personal development. The comparative analysis of the results obtained by students in the two scales is presented in Table 02.

Table 02. Analysis of the relation between self-esteem and self-assessment in relation to career choice, after the implementation of the counselling program.

Results related to self-esteem (according to the Rosenberg scale) and self-assessment in relation to career choice		Girls (nr. and %)		Boys (nr. and %)	
		Self-esteem	Self-assessment in relation to career choice	Self-esteem	Self-assessment in relation to career choice
Score	Low	7 (20%)	2 (5.71%)	2 (7.40%)	0 (0%)
	Medium	23 (65.71%)	20 (54.14%)	18 (66.66%)	20 (74.04%)
	High	5 (14.28%)	13 (37.14%)	7 (25.92%)	7 (25.92%)

The analysis of the data in table 01 reflects the fact that in the case of girls there is a good correspondence between the average scores obtained at the two scales, but there are differences in the low scores. Although 10 of the students have low self-esteem, only three have a low self-assessment scale in relation to their career, which may mean they are generally more confident when it comes to professional choices but in other segments of life they may have a lack of self-confidence. This is also confirmed by the high scores obtained in self-esteem by four of the students, while 11 of them are more self-assessing from the perspective of career choices. As far as boys are concerned, the results seem to indicate an attitude different from that of girls because they have a higher self-esteem but get a lower score on self-esteem in relation to career choices. As with girls, the highest scores indicate average scores on both scales. Differences between girls and boys can be explained by the fact that girls are generally more mature and more self-critical, which may help them to show lower self-esteem but be more realistic about career choices. At the same time, boys are more self-confident, have a high level of self-esteem, but are uncertain

regarding their professional choices, which indicates that they lack self-knowledge or they have not clarified their career options.

Table 02 shows that, following the counselling process, the number of girls with a low score on the self-esteem scale is lower than in the previous step, as is the case with the self-assessment scale in relation to career choice. Average scores are roughly the same, while for both scales the number of those who achieved a high score increased. For boys there was a more obvious progress, so that at the stage of the counseling program the number of those with low self-esteem or negative self-assessment in relation to career choices fell sharply. At the same time, the percentage of students who showed average levels in evaluation with the two scales increased. Unlike girls, for boys there were small decreases in the high scores obtained in the evaluation through the two scales, which could be explained by the increase in the degree of objectivity in self-knowledge and personal and professional self-assessment.

Reporting the results obtained in the two scales with adjustments made by students in their own career plans (in career counselling activities) we observed that they changed some professional options, presenting arguments based on self-assessment and self-validation.

7. Conclusion

The decision-making process regarding the option for a particular career is a complex one, involving not only strictly professional aspects but also personal and contextual ones, referring to their own expectations, according to their self-image, activities, roles and responsibilities fulfilled in other plans than the professional one. For this reason, the role of career counsellors is to help the subjects identify and clarify the values, skills, interests and motivations underlying career choices (Perrone, Webb, & Blalock, 2005).

The quality of the formation experiences of students through career counselling activities should be assessed by relating to their real personal needs and the concrete impact on their professional and personal lives (Savickas, 2005). Career counselling activities can bring benefits in a number of ways: self-knowledge, knowledge of vocational interests, support in situations of professional indecision, choosing an optimal career path, acquiring communication skills, controlling emotions, self-assessment of self-esteem, relations etc. It is necessary, however, for these activities to be well integrated into the structure of training programs, by developing an integrative theory of the transition from school to work (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997).

Supporting students in identifying the level of self-esteem, their own potential, the roles and statuses to be met in different jobs, facilitates the decision-making process regarding optimal career paths.

Values, attitudes and motivations influence their own choices/career choices, which is why career activities should also be oriented towards forming an objective self-image that is a basic factor in making professional choices and career planning.

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