

Gender Differences in Career Counseling: Influencing Factors and Coping Strategies

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Abstract: Gender differences significantly impact individuals' career choices, opportunities, and counseling needs. This paper examines gender differences in career counseling, focusing on influencing factors and coping strategies. The study draws on Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory as theoretical frameworks to understand the complex interplay between gender and career development. Through literature review and interviews, qualitative data is collected to explore the impact of gender on career counseling experiences and outcomes. The findings highlight the influence of societal expectations, family influences, gender bias, and discrimination on career choices. Gender-specific challenges, such as stereotype threat, confidence issues, and work-life balance concerns, are identified. Coping strategies, including mentorship, empowerment training, and supportive networks, are discussed as valuable interventions in career counseling. The study recommends practical strategies to promote gender equality in career development. These strategies include promoting awareness and education about gender biases, creating supportive work environments that value diversity, and integrating gender-sensitive approaches in career counseling practice. By recognizing and addressing the unique needs and experiences of individuals of different genders, more inclusive and equitable career environments can be created, leading to positive career outcomes and contributing to a diverse and thriving workforce.

Keywords: gender differences, career counseling, influencing factors, coping strategies, Social Role Theory, Gender Schema Theory, gender equality

1. Introduction

Gender plays a significant role in shaping individuals' career choices, opportunities, and experiences. Throughout history, women have faced numerous challenges and barriers in their career development, including gender stereotypes, discrimination, and limited access to leadership positions. As societies strive for greater gender equality and inclusivity, understanding the influence of gender on career counseling becomes essential.

The field of career counseling aims to support individuals in making informed career decisions, navigating career transitions, and achieving their professional goals. However, gender differences in career counseling have received limited attention in research and practice. Recognizing the unique challenges and experiences faced by individuals of different genders can enhance the effectiveness and relevance of career counseling interventions.

This study explores gender differences in career counseling, with a focus on influencing factors and coping strategies. By examining the various aspects of career development through a gender lens, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of how gender shapes individuals' career choices, experiences, and counseling needs. Additionally, the study aims to identify practical implications and recommendations for career counseling practice to address gender-specific challenges and promote gender equality in career development.

Theoretical frameworks such as Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory provide a foundation for understanding the impact of societal norms, expectations, and cognitive frameworks on individuals' career decisions and counseling experiences. These frameworks highlight the importance of considering gender-related factors in career counseling interventions and tailoring counseling approaches to meet the diverse needs of clients.

To achieve the research objectives, literature review and interview will be employed. Qualitative data will be collected through interviews and focus groups to gain in-depth insights into the impact of gender on career counseling experiences and outcomes.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender differences in career counseling, providing valuable insights for career counselors, educators, and policymakers. By enhancing our understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals of different genders, we can develop more inclusive and effective career counseling practices that promote gender equality and support individuals in their career development journey.

2. Background and Rationale for the Study

Gender disparities in career development have long been a prevalent issue, with women facing significant challenges and barriers in their professional pursuits. Throughout history, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and limited access to leadership positions have hindered women's career progress. As societies strive for greater gender equality and inclusivity, it is crucial to examine the influence of gender on career counseling to develop more effective interventions and support systems. Career counseling is a field dedicated to assisting individuals in making informed career decisions, navigating transitions, and achieving their professional goals. However, gender differences in career counseling have received limited attention in both research and practice. Recognizing the unique challenges and experiences faced by individuals of different genders can enhance the relevance and efficacy of career counseling interventions.

The present study aims to explore gender differences in career counseling, focusing on the factors that shape individuals' career choices, experiences, and counseling needs, as well as the coping strategies employed. By adopting a gender lens and examining various aspects of career development, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender influences individuals' career paths and inform the design of gender-responsive career counseling interventions. Moreover, the study aims to identify practical implications and recommendations to address gender-specific challenges and promote gender equality in career development.

Theoretical frameworks such as Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory provide a foundation for understanding the impact of societal norms, expectations, and cognitive frameworks on individuals' career decisions and counseling experiences. Social Role Theory emphasizes the predefined role expectations that society has for individuals, including gender-specific norms and behaviors. Gender Schema Theory focuses on cognitive schemas individuals develop regarding gender, which influence their perceptions and interpretations of gender-related information. These frameworks underscore the significance of considering gender-related factors in career counseling interventions and tailoring counseling approaches to meet the diverse needs of clients.

To achieve the research objectives, a comprehensive literature review and interview will be conducted to explore existing knowledge on gender differences in career counseling. This review will inform the development of interview protocols and focus group discussions to collect qualitative data. Interviews and focus groups will offer valuable insights and in-depth understanding of how gender influences individuals' career counseling experiences and outcomes.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender differences in career counseling. The insights gained will provide valuable guidance for career counselors, educators, and policymakers in developing inclusive and effective career counseling practices. By deepening our understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals of different genders, we can develop interventions and support systems that promote gender equality and empower individuals in their career development journey.

3. Theoretical frameworks

The two theoretical frameworks, Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory, are used in this study .

3.1. Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory developed from a combination of social psychology, sociology, and cognitive psychology. It emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier theories, such as psychoanalytic and trait theories, which focused primarily on individual characteristics rather than considering the social context. The theory suggests that individuals' behaviors and identities are not solely determined by individual characteristics but are influenced by the roles they occupy in society. The theory developed

from a combination of social psychology, sociology, and cognitive psychology. It emerged as a response to the limitations of earlier theories, such as psychoanalytic and trait theories, which focused primarily on individual characteristics rather than considering the social context. The theory suggests that individuals' behaviors and identities are not solely determined by individual characteristics but are influenced by the roles they occupy in society.

Social Role Theory encompasses key concepts and propositions related to role expectations, role adoption, role conflict, role salience, and stereotypes. According to the theory, society has predefined expectations for individuals in specific roles, including norms, beliefs, and associated behaviors. Individuals internalize these expectations and adjust their behaviors to conform to societal norms. Conflicts may arise when individuals encounter conflicting role expectations or when role expectations contradict their personal beliefs. The significance or importance of a role in an individual's life can vary, influencing the extent to which they conform to role expectations. Additionally, certain roles are stereotypically associated with specific characteristics or behaviors, shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and others in those roles. The theory has explored the influence of gender roles, occupational roles, age roles, and cultural differences on individuals' behavior and identity. Research indicates that individuals generally conform to societal gender expectations, and the level of conformity has implications for their self-perceptions and behavior (Eagly, 1987)^[11]. Similarly, studies have shown that individuals in leadership positions exhibit assertive and dominant behavior, aligning with societal expectations for those roles (Ridgeway, 2001)^[12]. Age roles also play a role, as older individuals often conform to age-related stereotypes, impacting their self-perceptions and behaviors (Kornadt & Rothermund, 2011)^[14]. Additionally, cultural variations in role expectations influence individuals' behaviors and identities, with those from collectivist cultures placing greater emphasis on fulfilling social roles and conforming to societal expectations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991)^[13]. These findings highlight the significance of social roles in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors within different contexts.

3.2. Gender Schema Theory

Gender Schema Theory is a psychological theory that proposes that individuals develop a set of cognitive frameworks, or schemas, regarding gender, which guide their understanding and interpretation of gender-related information. These schemas influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, as well as their behaviors and attitudes towards gender. The theory suggests that these gender schemas develop through socialization processes, including observing and imitating gender role models, receiving feedback and reinforcement based on gender-appropriate behavior, and internalizing societal expectations and norms regarding gender.

Gender Schema Theory was initially proposed by Sandra Bem in 1981 as an extension of cognitive theories of development. Bem argued that children actively process gender-related information and construct cognitive frameworks that organize and guide their understanding of gender. These gender schemas are shaped by societal influences and become a lens through which individuals interpret and evaluate the world around them. The theory emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in shaping gender identity, gender stereotypes, and gendered behavior. Recent studies have further explored and expanded upon Gender Schema Theory. For example, research has examined the impact of gender schemas on children's gender development and identity formation. It has been found that children who strongly adhere to traditional gender schemas exhibit greater gender-stereotyped behavior and preferences (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Other studies have investigated the influence of gender schemas on individuals' perceptions and evaluations of gender-related information, such as job advertisements or leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These studies highlight the ongoing relevance and application of Gender Schema Theory in understanding the role of cognitive processes in shaping gender-related attitudes and behaviors.

These theories provide a framework for analyzing the impact of societal norms, stereotypes, and cognitive processes on individuals' career choices, decisions, and experiences. This understanding can inform the development of effective interventions and coping strategies that promote gender equity, address biases, and support individuals in their career development.

4. Literature review

4.1. Social Roles and Occupational Preferences

Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann (2000) conducted a study revealing that social roles and gender

stereotypes strongly influence individuals' career choices and occupational preferences^[1]. Their findings indicated that individuals are more likely to pursue careers that align with societal expectations for their gender. This suggests that cultural norms and stereotypes shape individuals' perceptions of suitable career paths based on their gender.

4.2. Occupational Gender Segregation

Diekman and Eagly (2008) investigated the phenomenon of occupational gender segregation, which refers to the predominance of certain fields associated with one gender^[2]. Their research highlighted that societal beliefs about gender roles and stereotypes contribute to this segregation. This suggests that deeply ingrained societal perceptions and expectations influence the occupational choices available to individuals, reinforcing gender disparities.

4.3. Gender Differences in Leadership Roles

Eagly and Karau (2002) examined the influence of societal expectations and stereotypes on gender differences in leadership roles and positions^[3]. Their findings emphasized the barriers faced by women in accessing top leadership positions due to gender bias and stereotypes. This suggests that gender-related biases and stereotypes hinder women's career progression, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

4.4. Work-Family Balance and Career Choices

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) explored the impact of social roles and expectations on work-family balance decisions. Their research revealed that women often face greater pressure to balance work and family responsibilities, which can impact their career choices and advancement^[4]. This implies that societal expectations regarding gender roles and family responsibilities shape individuals' decisions and opportunities for career development.

4.5. Social Role Theory and Gender Disparities

Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) emphasized the utility of Social Role Theory in understanding gender disparities in career outcomes and suggesting interventions for promoting gender equality in the workplace^[5]. Social Role Theory acknowledges the influence of societal norms and stereotypes on individuals' behavior and choices, providing a framework to explain the disparities in career development between genders.

Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, and Garcia (2014) conducted a meta-analytic review, highlighting how individuals' gender schemas can influence their perceptions and experiences of discrimination, ultimately impacting their psychological well-being.

Additionally, the formation and perpetuation of gender stereotypes have been explored within the context of Gender Schema Theory. Eliot (2010) examined the role of gender schemas in the development and perpetuation of gender stereotypes, emphasizing the impact of these stereotypes on individuals' career choices and occupational preferences.

Studies have examined the relationship between coping strategies and stress within the framework of Gender Schema Theory. Siu, Lu, and Cooper (1999) investigated the influence of gender schemas on the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies among individuals experiencing managerial stress. These findings shed light on how gender schemas can shape individuals' responses to career-related stressors.

The interaction between gender schemas and other social identities has also been explored. Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe (2003) examined the construction of a minority group identity based on shared experiences of rejection, considering the role of gender schemas alongside other social identities, such as being an international student.

The literature reviewed suggests that Gender Schema Theory provides valuable insights into the development and influence of gender schemas on individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and experiences. The theory helps explain the formation and perpetuation of gender stereotypes, the impact of discrimination on psychological well-being, the selection and effectiveness of coping strategies, and the interaction of gender schemas with other social identities^[6].

5. Methodology

The data for this report were collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals representing diverse genders, professional backgrounds, and career stages. A total of 15 participants from Shanxi Technology And Business College were interviewed, consisting of five men, five women, and five individuals who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming. The interviews were conducted in a confidential and supportive environment, allowing participants to share their experiences openly.

The interview design is shown in Table 1

Table 1: Interview Structure.

No.	Steps	Content
1	Introduction and Rapport Building:	Begin the interview by introducing the purpose and nature of the study.
		Establish a supportive and confidential environment to encourage open sharing.
		Build rapport with the participants, making them feel comfortable and valued.
2	Personal Background and Career Choices:	Start by asking participants about their personal background, including their gender identity, professional background, and career stage.
		Inquire about the factors that influenced their career choices, such as societal expectations, family and cultural influences, and personal aspirations.
3	Gender-Specific Challenges in Career Counseling:	Explore participants' experiences and perceptions of gender-related challenges in their career development.
		Discuss the impact of gender stereotypes, bias, and discrimination on their career choices and progression.
		Inquire about any instances of stereotype threat, confidence and self-efficacy concerns, and work-life balance challenges they have encountered.
4	Coping Strategies and Interventions:	Discuss the strategies and coping mechanisms participants have employed to overcome gender-specific challenges in their careers.
		Inquire about any interventions or support systems they have found beneficial, such as mentorship, empowerment training, or networking opportunities.
		Explore participants' suggestions for potential career counseling interventions to address gender-related challenges and promote gender equality.
5	Reflection on Theoretical Frameworks:	Discuss the relevance of Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory to participants' career experiences.
		Inquire about their perspectives on the influence of societal expectations, stereotypes, and gender-related factors on their career choices and counseling needs.
		Seek participants' input on how these theoretical frameworks can inform career counseling interventions and support their career development.
6	Closing Remarks:	Provide an opportunity for participants to share any additional insights or experiences they consider relevant.
		Thank participants for their participation and contributions to the study.
		Assure participants of confidentiality and the importance of their input in shaping future career counseling practices.
7	Data Analysis:	The interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The responses will be transcribed, coded, and categorized into key themes and sub-themes related to influencing factors, gender-specific challenges, coping strategies, and interventions. The findings will be analyzed in relation to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks to derive meaningful insights.
8	Ethical Considerations:	Ethical guidelines will be followed throughout the interview process. Informed consent will be obtained from each participant, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality. Participants' anonymity will be maintained in the reporting of findings.

6. Analysis

The analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews focused on identifying key themes and sub-themes related to influencing factors, gender-specific challenges, coping strategies, and interventions in career counseling. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyze the interview responses and derive meaningful insights.

6.1. Influencing Factors in Career Choices

The analysis revealed several influencing factors in participants' career choices. Societal expectations

and stereotypes were found to play a significant role in shaping career decisions, as traditional gender roles often steer individuals towards specific career paths based on their gender. Family upbringing and cultural norms were identified as additional influential factors, with participants describing how family expectations and cultural traditions impacted their career choices and opportunities. Gender bias and discrimination in the workplace were also highlighted as influential factors, influencing participants' career choices and progression. Participants emphasized the need for supportive and inclusive work environments to mitigate these challenges.

6.2. Gender-Specific Challenges in Career Counseling

Participants shared their experiences and perceptions of gender-specific challenges in career counseling. Stereotype threat emerged as a concern, with participants expressing how gender stereotypes affected their self-perception and career aspirations. They emphasized the importance of addressing and challenging these stereotypes in the counseling process to foster a more accurate and empowering self-perception. Confidence and self-efficacy were identified as crucial areas affected by gender-related societal pressures, impacting participants' belief in pursuing certain career paths. Building self-confidence and enhancing self-efficacy were highlighted as key areas for intervention in career counseling. Work-life balance was also identified as a unique challenge faced by women, emphasizing the need for strategies and support in managing work-life integration effectively.

6.3. Coping Strategies and Interventions

The analysis identified coping strategies and interventions employed by participants to overcome gender-specific challenges in their careers. Mentorship and access to role models were highlighted as valuable resources, enabling individuals to navigate gender-related challenges successfully. Participants suggested the implementation of mentorship programs and networking opportunities in career counseling interventions. Empowerment and assertiveness training emerged as important interventions to build assertiveness skills and challenge gender biases and stereotypes. Networking and supportive communities, such as professional associations and affinity groups, were emphasized as providing a sense of community and resources for career advancement.

6.4. Theoretical Frameworks: Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory

The findings were analyzed in relation to Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory, providing a theoretical framework to understand the influence of gender on career counseling. Social Role Theory highlighted how societal expectations, stereotypes, and gender bias shape individuals' career choices. The analysis supported the theory by revealing participants' experiences of traditional gender roles and expectations shaping their decision-making process. Family and cultural influences were also consistent with Social Role Theory. Gender Schema Theory emphasized the influence of gender stereotypes on individuals' self-perception and the impact of societal pressures on confidence and self-belief. The analysis corroborated the theory by uncovering participants' concerns about stereotype threat and the importance of building confidence and self-efficacy. Work-life balance challenges faced by women aligned with the theory's recognition of social roles and expectations.

7. Findings

7.1. Influencing Factors in Career Choices

Societal Expectations: Participants highlighted the influence of societal expectations and stereotypes on their career choices. Traditional gender roles and expectations often steer individuals towards certain career paths based on their gender.

7.2. Family and Cultural Influences

Family upbringing and cultural norms were identified as significant factors shaping career choices. Participants described how family expectations and cultural traditions impacted their decisions and opportunities.

7.3. Gender Bias and Discrimination

Many participants shared experiences of gender bias and discrimination in the workplace, which influenced their career choices and progression. They highlighted the need for supportive and inclusive work environments.

7.4. Gender-Specific Challenges in Career Counseling

Stereotype Threat: Participants expressed concerns about gender stereotypes affecting their self-perception and career aspirations. They emphasized the importance of addressing and challenging these stereotypes in the counseling process.

Confidence and Self-Efficacy: Several participants discussed how gender-related societal pressures affected their confidence and self-belief in pursuing certain career paths. Building self-confidence and enhancing self-efficacy emerged as crucial areas for career counseling interventions.

Work-Life Balance: Balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities was identified as a unique challenge faced by women. Participants highlighted the need for strategies and support in managing work-life integration effectively.

7.5. Coping Strategies and Interventions

Mentorship and Role Models: Participants emphasized the importance of mentorship and access to role models who have successfully navigated similar gender-related challenges in their careers. They suggested implementing mentorship programs and networking opportunities.

7.6. Empowerment and Assertiveness Training

Building assertiveness skills and empowering individuals to challenge gender biases and stereotypes were suggested as valuable interventions in career counseling.

Networking and Supportive Communities: Participants emphasized the role of networking and support systems, such as professional associations and affinity groups, in providing a sense of community and resources for career advancement.

7.7. Influencing Factors from Social Role Theory

Societal Expectations and Stereotypes: Social Role Theory suggests that societal expectations and stereotypes influence individuals' career choices. Participants in the study highlighted how traditional gender roles and expectations shaped their decision-making process, leading them towards certain career paths based on their gender.

7.8. Family and Cultural Influences

Social Role Theory also emphasizes the impact of family and cultural influences on career choices. Participants discussed how family expectations and cultural norms played a significant role in shaping their career decisions and opportunities.

7.9. Gender Bias and Discrimination

Social Role Theory recognizes the presence of gender bias and discrimination in the workplace. Participants shared experiences of gender bias and discrimination, which influenced their career choices and progression. They emphasized the importance of supportive and inclusive work environments in mitigating these challenges.

7.10. Coping Strategies from Gender Schema Theory

Challenging Stereotypes and Self-Perception: Gender Schema Theory highlights the influence of gender stereotypes on individuals' self-perception. Participants expressed the need for career counseling interventions that address and challenge these stereotypes, enabling individuals to develop a more accurate and empowering self-perception in relation to their career aspirations.

7.11. Building Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Gender Schema Theory suggests that gender-related societal pressures can affect individuals' confidence and self-belief in pursuing certain career paths. Participants emphasized the importance of career counseling interventions focused on building self-confidence and enhancing self-efficacy to overcome gender-related challenges and pursue their desired careers^[7].

7.12. Work-Life Integration Strategies

Gender Schema Theory recognizes the impact of social roles and expectations on work-life balance decisions. Women, in particular, face unique challenges in balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities. Participants highlighted the need for career counseling interventions that provide strategies and support in managing work-life integration effectively, addressing the gender-specific challenges they face^[8].

Incorporating these factors and coping strategies derived from Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory into career counseling interventions can enhance the effectiveness of counseling approaches. By recognizing the influence of societal expectations, stereotypes, and gender-related challenges, career counselors can provide tailored guidance, empowerment, and support to individuals of all genders, ultimately promoting gender equality and facilitating positive career outcomes.

8. Strategies to be Put Forward

Promoting Awareness and Education: To address the influence of societal expectations and stereotypes on career choices, it is crucial to raise awareness and provide education about gender biases and their impact on career development. This can be done through workshops, training programs, and educational campaigns targeting individuals, families, educational institutions, and workplaces^[9].

Creating Supportive Work Environments: Organizations should strive to create inclusive and supportive work environments that value diversity and provide equal opportunities for career growth. This can be achieved by implementing policies and practices that address gender bias and discrimination, promoting work-life balance, and fostering mentorship and sponsorship programs.

Integrating Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Career Counseling: Career counselors should adopt gender-sensitive approaches in their practice, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by individuals of different genders. This includes incorporating interventions that challenge gender stereotypes, enhance self-confidence and self-efficacy, and provide strategies for managing work-life integration effectively^[10].

9. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, it is evident that gender plays a significant role in shaping individuals' career choices, experiences, and counseling needs. Societal expectations, family influences, gender bias, and discrimination are influential factors that can impact career development. Additionally, gender-specific challenges such as stereotype threat, confidence issues, and work-life balance concerns require attention in career counseling interventions.

By integrating the principles of Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory into career counseling practice, counselors can better understand the influence of societal norms, stereotypes, and cognitive frameworks on individuals' career decisions. Implementing strategies such as promoting awareness and education, creating supportive work environments, and adopting gender-sensitive approaches in counseling can contribute to fostering gender equality and facilitating positive career outcomes for individuals of all genders.

Addressing these challenges and promoting gender equality in career development is not only beneficial for individuals but also for society as a whole. By recognizing and addressing the unique needs and experiences of individuals of different genders, we can create more inclusive and equitable career environments that maximize human potential and contribute to a more diverse and thriving workforce.

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