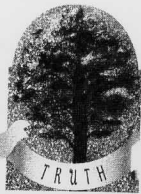


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Factors Influencing Major Choosing Process in the University: A Qualitative
Research Analysis

Salpi Jingoezian-Moughalian

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Social & Behavioral Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education – Emphasize Counseling at Haigazian University.

Beirut – Lebanon

May 18, 2010

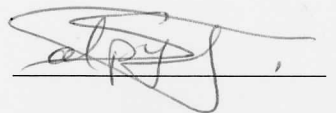
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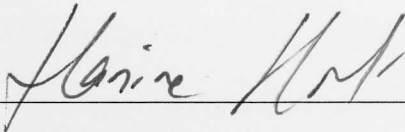
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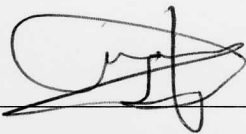
Factors Influencing Major Choosing Process in the University: A Qualitative
Research Analysis

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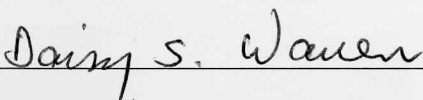
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my lovely daughter, Serli, who opened up a whole new world to me, one who is filled with love and beauty.

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ABSTRACT

The present qualitative study examined the students' career maturity, cultural background, parental role, gender differences, economical difficulties, and school career counseling services that influenced the university major selection process on a sample of Lebanese university students ($N = 249$). The study relied on self-report measures, mainly demographic information and a questionnaire that consisted of 42 items. Results were analyzed qualitatively. The results showed that the students are aware of their strengths, limitations and skills to make appropriate decisions. Culture, religion, and parental involvement were the least influential factors on students' career choice. Females are far less likely to enter science-based occupations than males, whereas males are more inspired to obtain careers with high income. Career counseling services are not the primary source of information for students. The need for effective education-career planning programs in schools is expressed by the students.

Factors Influencing Major Choosing Process in the University: A Qualitative Research Analysis

Choosing a major may be a little daunting, many factors such as, cultural influence, parental involvement, gender issues, economical difficulties, demands of the job market, the kind of school guidance provided in schools, and adolescents' career maturity contribute to the university major choosing process.

If students base their decision on any of the previous mentioned factors, they sometimes end up enrolling in a major that they are not interested in, or in some cases they change their major frequently.

The present study proposed a number of career planning skills and activities in order to help Lebanese adolescents make informed decisions of what best suits them, based on their personal qualities, abilities, skills, interests and values.

Statement of the Problem

Studying in college is one of the most challenging periods in a young person's life. The most important decision includes the choice of a major. Sometimes university students change their chosen major several times during their studying. So, selecting a university major requires a serious and mature attitude. Some high school students know exactly what they want to do with the rest of their lives before they ever step in a university. For these students, choosing a major is usually a relatively easy decision. Most of these students will pick a major that is closely related to their intended career field whereas many others will select a particular college because it offers the specific major that they are interested in. Other students, on the other hand, are clueless, and feel confused when it comes to choosing their major, and as a result they major in a field they are not interested in. In fact, some students don't settle on a major until they reach their

junior year. Therefore, schools should facilitate school-to-university transition by implementing career guidance programs in their academic curriculum. In this manner, professional school counselors should teach students career decision-making skills to establish specific and attainable career goals.

In the past, the vocational choices were limited and the occupational options of the students were determined by asking the children “What do you want to be when you grow up?” This attitude towards students’ future plans should be changed. As a result the schools are required to adopt serious approaches to expand students’ vocational understanding and the career counselor should assist students to develop occupational awareness and preparation during all the developmental levels. Because currently the technological advances push the students to select specific university majors as a necessity for entering today’s job market.

Beside technology there are other factors such as; gender, culture, the need of job market and parental involvement that are influencing students’ career and major choices at the university. More specifically, such factors are contributing negatively to the “career maturity” level of the young people and later to their career and university major choices in the university. *Career maturity* refers to the one’s awareness to make age-appropriate realistic career choices and consistent future decisions (Super, 1990). According to Zunker (2002) “Career maturity implies a stabilized identity that provides individuals with a framework for making career choices..... it is a continuous developmental process.....” (p. 438). Super (1990) considers that the completion of proper vocational developmental tasks at each stage of development is a sign of *vocational maturity*. Studying the impact of the different factors influencing the young Lebanese students will help shed light on the concept of the career maturity in a developing society.

One broad and major problem that has an effect on the Lebanese students' career maturity is the economical difficulties of the country and the lack of different career opportunities in the job market. As we know, the critical changes in the economic structure of the world have their influence on Lebanon also. These economical challenges of the country are controlling the students' future education in many different ways. In view of the fact that the worldwide economical recession is equally influencing Lebanon, young people are concerned about employment options or unemployment and have problems choosing their career path ways.

Another barrier that makes the career decision-making process difficult for the Lebanese high school students is their cultural background, which, many times, shapes their career decisions. Lebanese students experience decision conflicts to build their own cultural identity. For example, while entering the labor-market there are still employers who prefer offering certain positions to applicants who are from their own racial/ethnic groups.

From a different angle, work related values are controlled by the background of each person. According to Hijazi, et al. (2004) Arab male adolescents are confused between their own values and the social expectations which are not allowing them to discover additional information related to their career options, and the Arab female adolescents are facing more obstructions because they are not expected to be in the career field, but they should contribute in their society as a wife and a mother.

Gender also, has a continual influence on the career maturity process of adolescents. That's why, students have some gender differences in the way that their career personalities are developed. According to Sellers et al. (1999) children tend to select occupations which are gender stereotyped, that is, occupations which are "suitable" for men or for women. Therefore, school counselors should implement different kind of techniques and activities to reduce this

gender stereo-type attitude. Moreover, the results in Perrone's (2001) research revealed that during the university freshman years, males based their occupational goals on high salaries but the females based their career goals on social status. This gender stereo-typed attitude differs within every culture in Lebanon, and as a result, the opportunities and the demands of both genders differ because of their different lifestyles.

Parental involvement is another factor that influences Lebanese students' educational and career decisions. Although the teachers' responsibility in the career awareness process is very significant since they possess essential information about their students' academic and personal background (Trusty et al., 2005) it seems that family and parental expectations of Lebanese students were the determinant for their future career plans more than that of the schoolteachers (Kibbi, 1995). Parents' emotional support and verbal encouragement affect positively on the adolescents' career planning and exploration as well as having a career role model within the family structure that influence the students' career maturity. On the other hand, parental pressure and parental expectations in selecting university major negatively affect the adolescents' occupational aspirations. Moreover, lack of parental support is associated negatively with career indecision. In this context, counselors should help parents to have an active and influential role in their children's educational experience and career exploration.

All these factors increase the need for establishing effective career development programs in schools to provide age appropriate vocational knowledge as well as self-awareness (Feller, 2003). As students reach secondary grades, after which a successful transition to the world of work is expected, more comprehensive career counseling programs have to be integrated (Lapan & Kosciulek, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

Unfortunately, most schools in Lebanon have been giving little attention to all the combined factors the researcher has just discussed and their effect on students' career development awareness and eventually their choice of university major at the end of the secondary years. In light of this fact, the purpose of this current study was, therefore, to understand and analyze the factors that influence the young Lebanese students' university major choosing process. This qualitative analysis will then provide a rationale for establishing career counseling programs from preschool through secondary in our Lebanese schools.

Research questions

More specifically, this study investigated six major research questions regarding the young Lebanese students' career development and university major choosing process:

- (1) To what extent are parents involved in their children's career choice?
- (2) What is the influence of gender on the students' university major choices?
- (3) What kind of school guidance programs were provided for them?
- (4) Does the career planning of young Lebanese students reflect career maturity?
- (5) To what extent do young Lebanese students take into consideration the need of the job market?
- (6) Do cultural values influence the career choices of young Lebanese university students?

Methodology

This study is a qualitative analysis of the different factors including certain barriers that influence young Lebanese students' choice of a university major. Since career counseling in Lebanese schools is still in its early stages and hence, no significant research is available to provide context for this study, a qualitative research methodology based on research questions and not hypotheses, seemed to be the more appropriate choice of data collection and analysis.

Instrument

To answer the imposed research questions, the researcher designed a 42-item questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was constructed to identify different factors of expected influences. The 42 open-ended questions could be categorized under 9 categories: the first set of questions was to understand the “*cultural influence*” in terms of students' ethnic background, religious beliefs, and cultural values. The second set was evaluating the “*parental influence*” on students' decision making process. The questions in the third set were to realize the “*financial consideration*” that students were expecting regarding their future career as well as the financial difficulties that they faced while enrolling in university. The forth set was about the “*job characteristics*” or students' awareness of job availability in the local market. The questions in the fifth set were to identify the different “*career information search*” method that the students carry out when they were in high school. The sixth set of questions was to analyze the students' point of view concerning “*gender influence*” on their chosen major. The seventh set was to investigate “*students' personal qualities and interests*” as well as their awareness of their skills, abilities, interests and job varieties as related to their chosen major. The eighth set was to discover their knowledge about the “*characteristics of the chosen major*”, and the

advantages and the disadvantages related to it. The last question in the ninth set was exploring the “*students’ future plans*”.

Participants

A total of 249 randomly selected students from 7 universities and different majors were selected to answer the 42-item questionnaire. Hundred-six (43%) of the participants were males and hundred forty-three (57%) were females, selected from one public and 6 private universities.

The age of 40 male students (16%) was below 21 years, 65 male students (26%) were between 21 and 29 years old and one male student was between 40 and 49 years old. The age of 70 female students (28%) was below 21 years, 71 female students (29%) were between 21 and 29 years old and 2 female students (1%) were between 30 and 39 years old.

Procedure

Once permission at administrative level from different universities was obtained, participants were contacted during a regular university day to answer the questionnaire that contained the 42-items and the demographic questions (see Appendix A). The classroom instructors, who had been provided with instructions regarding the survey questionnaire, administrated the form to the university students. The participants were given the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire entirely voluntary. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire in approximately in 30 minutes.

Professional Significance of the Study

Firstly, this study is conducted to illustrate and analyze the different factors that influence and contribute to the students' major and career decision-making process. Therefore, it should help the young Lebanese to have a clearer and maturer plan for their career future that stems from an understanding of self and the world of work.

Secondly, this study is conducted to encourage Lebanese schools to establish career counseling services as an integrated part in the academic life of the students. Understanding the reasons behind the Lebanese students' choice of major in college should provide Lebanese schools with the necessary framework to design their career counseling programs and activities.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the study, the following terms are defined:

Career maturity: individual's intellectual readiness to grasp career developmental skills and self-awareness to make career decisions (Super, 1984).

Career counseling: incorporate all counseling tasks related with career decision making and planning process, by taking into consideration all the factors that influence on individuals' needs during ones' entire life developmental stages (Zunker, 2002).

Culture: the set of social customs, attitudes, values, ideas, events, beliefs, arts and behaviors shared by a particular population in a society, that are transmitted from one generation to the next (Zunker, 2002).

Gender stereo-type: attitudes, traits, behaviors, and personality characteristics that influence on the occupational choices of males and females (Creed & Patton, 2003).

Delimitations

This study had following limitations. First, a single data source was used. If the researcher had collected additional information from parents and teachers, these multiple sources of information would have further illuminated the findings. Second, the sample was a convenient sample. The data were gathered from one public and 6 private universities. Therefore, readers may not generalize the findings to all the postsecondary institutions in the country. Third, the study included only juniors and seniors, who are not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Career Maturity

Career maturity is the individual's readiness to make educational or career decisions with independent thought and planning (Watson, 2005). One dimension of career maturity is displaying more self-awareness and career planning process by identifying the different requirements of various occupations (Tang, 2003). Moreover, career maturity highlight the importance of career decision-making skills, by listing all the alternative careers or relating personal current conditions to future goals (Powell & Luzzo, 1998). There are many elements related to career maturity (Herr, 2001), such as, age, gender, ethnic background, academic achievement and school grades, socioeconomic status, and intellectual abilities (Powell & Luzzo, 1998).

Results in many different researches reveal that males have higher career maturity than females (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; Patton & Creed, 2001; Powell & Luzzo, 1998), especially those who had work-related skills, such as computing skills or those who had career role models exposed positive associations with career maturity (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002). Moreover, students who reported high academic achievement in Patton's (2007) research indicated more career maturity and high self-esteem because they had more career knowledge.

Considering all these aspects curriculum developers should plan programs designed to enhance career maturity (Patton & Creed, 2001). The role of the career counselor in this program is in assisting students to enhance their career maturity by implementing different strategies during all the developmental stages, to develop more mature career decision-making attitudes

(Powell & Luzzo, 1998). Finally, helping adolescents' to be ready for career planning (Patton & Creed, 2001), by exploring the barriers to achieve their goals (Feller et al., 2001).

Cultural Influence on Career Decision-Making Process

Students represent a variety of family forms and cultures, and each one has its own identity and lifestyle that differ from one culture to another. Sometimes cultural values limit the occupational choices of the students (Brown, 2002). For this reason, several career theories focus on specific cultural values as essential factors that control students' career choices (Hartung, 2002). For example, according to Mau, (2004), students from individual-oriented cultures have fewer major or career related problems because their culture encourages an independent career decision making process; but students from collective-oriented cultures have more problems because their family's ambitions are more emphasized than their own personal needs. Accordingly, school counselors should take into consideration these cultural factors to improve the occupational expectations of students from different ethnic groups, and "encourage students to explore their career and academic identities" (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 264). At the same time, counselors should help students distinguish between those cultural values that are considered risky and those that are beneficial to their society; for example, the denial of education to girls and women represents disrespect for their dignity and freedom, and accordingly counselors should lift students to come close to more democratic values (Hansen, 2003). All this can be achieved through effective career counseling programs where the career counselor plays a mediating role between the student's cultural background and his/her interests. Also career counselors should design and develop different approaches and techniques that better suit each student's culture.

Kibbi (2005) highlighted the cultural diversity between the American and the Lebanese educational structure and concluded that in Lebanon different religious sects and family values are influencing individual needs. So, this cultural pressure on the Middle Eastern students has its consequences on their future decisions. For this reason, Lebanese students are in need for culturally appropriate career counseling models. This culturally sensitive approach will grant them the tools to explore their own interests and abilities as well as to perceive all the information they need concerning the majors of their choices. Finally, it is important to attempt to reduce the negative cultural influences on students that are causing dissatisfaction with their career goals and aspirations. Instead, students should be guided to discover all their available career opportunities (Kibbi, 2005).

Parental Role in Career Planning

Students bring to school the values and the beliefs of their parents that shape their career choice preferences. This implies that the major choosing process is also influenced by the parental involvement because parents are considered to be the direct facilitators of their children (Carter, 2000). Some parents encourage their children to enroll in particular university majors, others force their daughters or especially their sons to choose a major that prepares them to take over the family business; where certain careers are transmitted within a patriarchal family context mainly in the Middle Eastern countries (Sharabi, 1988). Yet, other parents affect their children's career aspirations and choice of university major indirectly. Specifically, the parents' educational level and their obsession with certain "prestigious" professions indirectly make their children aim for certain careers and not others (Ojeda & Flores, 2008).

According to Rowan-Kenyon (2008) parents should encourage their children to enroll in new majors as well as discuss with their children college-related activities and visit colleges. Moreover, younger adolescents who get parental support in their career decision-making task will be more confident to set up their future plans (Turner & Lapan's, 2002). For example, in Trusty's (2004) research the results showed that children are affected positively by their parents' expectations over and above their own expectations. Moreover, in the Lebanese culture, children take into consideration their parental expectations, roles and responsibilities because they are of the major values that shape their lives (Kibbi, 2005). On the other hand, lack of parental involvement seems problematic, especially if they limit their children's future educational choices (Akos, 2007), or if they rely on school and teachers to help their children in the major choosing process (Rowan-Kenyon, 2008).

Moreover, parents are engaged differently with the future plans of their adolescent daughters and sons. For example, the results in Carter's (2000) research revealed that specific social conditions, such as; delayed marriage and increased rate of divorce in the United States, made the parents more involved with their daughters' educational plans and future career opportunities, than their sons, because females should be able to support themselves without depending on others.

School counselors should persuade parents' participation through different activities, such as, preparing the family tree by bringing up the different careers of the family members and their educational level; or parents sharing their work experience with the students in the class or in the work environment (Herting & Blackhurst, 2000).

Finally, active parental involvement with their children's future educational and career choices is very essential to ensure for positive and successful career developmental process of the students (Carter, 2000).

Gender Differences in Career Planning

Gender is one of the major issues that influence the career development of young people in many countries, although its impact differs from one region to another. Stereotyping regarding career options in the world of work still exists in many societies (Zunker, 2002). And as a result of this, gender differences play a considerable role during the students' career decision-making process. For example, during the lower elementary classes, children might relate certain careers with only one gender, but as they grow up, their intellectual ability increases to notice the exception of this rule (Lackland & DeLisi, 2001). In Bobo and Durodoye's (1998) research, elementary aged female students tend to select careers that previously were viewed as boys' careers but boys were less likely to choose careers that were distinguished as girls' careers. High school students, on the other hand, might have the experience to get in touch with adults who are involved in careers dominated by the opposite gender (Auger et al., 2005).

In the past decades, women's role was limited in being a mother or a house-wife only and the man's role was to support his family through his career, but today each has his/her own path in planning for his/her career goals in order to build an improved and enhanced society. For example, according to Trusty and Niles (2004), the economic necessity and the need for personal achievements, make more women enter into the world of work and get university education to contribute to the society in a better way. Similarly, in the Middle Eastern countries, such as in Lebanon, the education of females has been a complex issue, but presently there is a significant

increase in the number of the females enrolled in the universities (Mideast & N. Africa Encyclopedia, 2004).

Moreover, societal expectations concerning male and female roles in organizational management differ from culture to culture (Feller, 2005). For example, in Patton and Creed's (2001) research, the results illustrate that, even though secondary female Australian students have more information than males in career development, however they have problems in deciding between going into the career field or accomplishing their desire of motherhood.

Children's career choices begin to be formed by gender influences which later affect their career maturity. Male adolescents (ages 14-18 years) in Flouri & Buchanan's (2002) research show greater maturity than females because they had the opportunity to be part-time employees and hence gained work-related skills.

According to Hansen (2003), although there is gender awareness in schools, universities and, workplaces, still the professional programs and many societies need great improvement to diminish the gender stereotype attitude. Career counselors should be aware that gender influences students' worldview and career identity (Niles, 2003). Accordingly, they might use many approaches that could be beneficial to the students to decrease gender stereo-type career choices. Such as, inviting speakers, reading stories, and taking them to career fairs to view workers in their natural settings, all these may help reduce students' gender stereotypes (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008). It is very important to correct students' misperception about different types of careers and broaden their awareness to facilitate their major choosing process. In Kolodinsky's et al. (2006) research, the high school-aged adolescent females stated feeling more knowledgeable and qualified about the careers that they formerly understood to be male careers, after attending a career fair and exposed to female professional models. Consequently,

different gender roles should be reinforced and presented by the counselor, so that students might have a variety of career opportunities and choices (Kolodinsky et. al., 2006).

Economical Difficulties

Economic needs influence the students' future university major choosing process.

Especially, during the recent years, many countries continue to undergo critical changes in the economic structure and because of that, there is an awareness of either securing attractive and well paying jobs, or to owning and operating personal businesses (Lapan & Kosciulek, 2003)). In every nation, people from urban or rural areas are in search for economic, social, and psychological security (Gysbers, 2001). This current economic depression is causing the young adolescents to be concerned about job placement and unemployment, therefore there is a need for career counseling and guidance in the schools (Herr & Shahnasarian, 2001).

In Lebanon, people suffered from long and difficult years of civil wars, which had their influence on the career choices and the opportunities of the new generation. These wars didn't help to create new jobs instead they hastened the emigration of manpower and young people. According to Kibbi (2005) this atmosphere motivated the young Lebanese adolescents to pursue higher education, in order to take part in the economical growth and reconstruction of Lebanon.

Moreover, to understand how economic forces influence the career development process, career counselors should identify the parents' socioeconomic status when investigating students' occupational interests. For instance, according to Duflfy and Sedlacek (2007) "students whose parents had either lower or higher than average incomes may have been influenced by both the negative and the positive effects of salary on a family environment and thus would have had more extrinsically oriented goals" such as "high anticipated earnings" (p. 363). Valadez (1998)

highlighted in his research that, “higher SES students are more likely to take advantage of the resources needed to shape decisions about college than lower SES students” (p. 19). Finally, school counselors, should be aware that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds desire to create better financially secure futures for them.

The changes in the economy does not simply require more education or attending college, but it is a unique implication for the school counselor first, to provide the students with the opportunity to explore their personal abilities; second, assess their academic achievements; third, inform them what realistic career options exist; forth, notify them about the requirements of the various options available in the job market; and finally teach them career planning and decision making methods (Rosenbaum & Person, 2003).

Importance of Career Counseling in Schools

In the light of what has been discussed so far, it seems that career counseling in schools has become a top priority. According to Akos (2007) schools are challenged to make sure that students are ready for their future education. The new demands of the job market require schools to take serious initiatives in the field of career developmental guidance as students need to recognize the wide range of roles in different available careers. This can be achieved through integrating career education into the school curriculum. Schools should be able to provide occupational information, guidance and awareness of different majors and careers as well as career counseling for students in order to help them find their most suitable career pathway.

Referring to the National Career Development Association (1997) career counseling is defined as "the process of assisting individuals in the development of a life-career with focus on the definition of the worker role and how that role interacts with other life roles" (p. 1). Although

career counseling intervention is neither the same nor at the same level of development around the world, but the importance of using different interventions for career development is considered the basic ground for establishing strengthened choices of major in the university and careers in the future (Herr, 2001). From this perspective, career counseling and guidance should be an important part of the school's educational program because many high school students have great concerns about their choice of a university major and about their future career preferences (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2003). So, during the academic school year individual or group career counseling sessions can be very helpful for the students to get the necessary information and then take action regarding their future career (Jarvis, 2003).

Regardless of age level, early career awareness by school counselors is essential for the students to explore the relationship between school learning and the requirements of the world of the job market. For example, most of the ninth graders, in Gibbons et al. (2006) research when asked directly about what they know and need to know concerning college and career planning, revealed lack of active investigation related to their options that they had in mind and wished to receive extra information concerning their future plans. Also, the freshman students in Mauer and Gysbers' (1990) study were facing the same difficulties, because they had uncertainty - about their university major - that was associated to several factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence and information. As for the middle school students, Akos (2004) suggested that they should make their educational choices before entering the high school because they are in need for identity formation which can be achieved through self-knowledge and awareness. In spite of everything, the career choice that the students make in the high school classes is considered a major turning point in their lives. So, valuable career counseling programs should be applied to help students discover the different kind of university majors and career options. For example, it

has been observed in Gushue's et al. (2006) research, that high school students, who had a clear idea of their targets, were those who were more self-assured in their capability to complete the tasks associated to career decision making and they were engaged in more career exploration activities. As for the adolescents (ages 14-18 years) in Flouri & Buchanan's (2002) research showed greater career maturity when having a role model and work-related skills.

According to Mullins-Beggs et al.'s (2008) the career counseling process includes the following basic procedures: teaching students' information search techniques and decision-making skills, as well as considering the students' awareness of their abilities and interests to match them to their chosen major. In this context, the theories and the techniques that are used in the career counseling school programs should be appropriate and sensitive to each student's cultural background (Hartung, 2002), and gender (Whiston, 2003). Also, the methods used in the career counseling programs should help students to realize their personal needs (Chen, 2003) and improve career decision-making skills (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). In addition, the career counseling process in schools should take into consideration the needs of the current economic, political, technological and social changes in the world (Chen, 2003). Finally, career counseling should be a long life process, because despite of their primary career choice, college students change their major in their university years (Taylor, 1997).

The Role of the School Counselor

School counselors should play an active and an influential role in preparing students for a successful transition to a wide range of postsecondary opportunities, including college or university (Feller, 2003). School counselors should expand and shape the abilities, the interests,

and the skills that every student possesses, because this will help him/her achieve his/her goals, and eventually establish a bridge between the school and the world of work (Tan, 2002).

Moreover, school counselors should implement career counseling intervention strategies at every academic stage, mostly at the high school level, because these students are more actively preparing and applying for their postsecondary opportunities (Mei et al., 2008). For example, in elementary classes school counselors should focus on enhancing students' self-esteem, and in the upper classes counselors should increase students' career awareness to help them in the decision-making process (Mcintosh, 2000). These procedures are important for the graduating high school students to be ready to enter the world of work with comprehensive and current, updated career information. If the students were to make faulty decisions regarding their future careers then the negative consequences will fall onto the students (Trusty et al., 2005). Moreover, students should be taught to base their choice of a college major on their interests (what they like to do) and on their abilities (what they are able to do or are good at doing) if they were to make the right major or career choices (Palladino Schultheiss et al., 2005).

When career counseling is organized and implemented in the schools as an integrated program, then it will be much easier for the school counselor to introduce different kinds of careers and their requirements throughout the 12 school years. Afterwards, students gradually can acquire accurate knowledge and growing awareness of these various occupations and can develop realistic plans for reaching their goals. School counselors can apply many techniques to help the students to accomplish their targets and to find out ways to maximize their choices in the job market. For instance, offering career orientation workshops and organizing career fair to demonstrate different careers (Perrone, 2001), providing career resource libraries (Akos, 2004), exploring occupations through imaginary play, inviting workers and employees to perform their

career skills in the class setting, and guiding students to new environments to directly observe new occupations.

Moreover, school counselors should aid high school students' parents become aware of the broad range of the different kinds of postsecondary educational and career options by providing them with all the needed resources and instructions (Hoyt, 2001). According to Alliman-Brissett et al.'s (2004), school counselors should help parents through various methods, such as, role playing or showing video tapes that present different parenting styles to teach them effective career-related communication skills with their daughters and sons. The career counselor should also highlight the role of the parents as role models (Kimweli & Richards, 1999).

Furthermore, career counselors should be aware of the cultural values of each student (Fouad, 2005). These values are the ideas and behaviors that they believe in and are the result of their ethnic and cultural background (Mau, 2004). Some careers provide a scope for expressing what the students believe in, while other occupations go against certain values. So, students' choices should reflect their value system, because there is a strong relationship between jobs and lifestyle (O'Shea, 2003). Taking into consideration all the work related values, school counselors should help students decide which choice best fits them based on their own values or principles that guide them (Watson, 2005).

According to Lease (2003), gender awareness therapy is an important strategy in the responsibilities of the career counselors, so that students can be able to consider a wide range of occupational options. Career counselors should help male and female students to decrease gender stereotype attitudes while choosing their majors in the university and their careers in the future.

In conclusion, the students' career decision making process is associated with many elements, mainly the adolescents' career maturity level, gender role expectations, parental

concerns regarding their children's career plans, perception of the barriers that surge from their cultural differences, the ethnic background and the socioeconomic status, as well as the economic system that sometimes controls the preferred choice of major or career. All of these interactive elements can restrict the students from making mature career choice. Also, this research argued that career counseling services should exist in the school program to enhance the students' career development for making future career decisions which should be implemented by professional career counselors whose job is to help students understand clearly the context of career planning. In its constant effort this study was conducted to identify the different factors that influence Lebanese students' choice of university major and future career.

More specifically, this study investigated six major research questions regarding the young Lebanese students' career development and university major choosing process:

- (1) To what extent are parents involved in their children's career choice?
- (2) What is the influence of gender on the students' university major choices?
- (3) What kind of school guidance programs were provided for them?
- (4) Does the career planning of young Lebanese students reflect career maturity?
- (5) To what extent do young Lebanese students take into consideration the need of the job market?
- (6) Do cultural values influence the career choices of young Lebanese university students?

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Forty-two subjective questionnaires were distributed to 249 participants. 143 participants were females (57%) and 106 participants were males (43%). The following are the qualitative data which are categorized under 7 headings or themes.

Factors Influencing Career Maturity

Job Characteristics

Job characteristics are still important considerations in selecting academic majors. Students in this research matched their chosen future career with their personal interests, external motivations, internal happiness and/or their strengths. "There is a big demand for social workers. I can work in the United Nations, Red Cross, orphanages or hospitals, because my aim is to help people," said one student. "I enjoy designing, creating and producing and I believe that marketing and advertisement are highly needed in every kind of job in Lebanon," explained another student.

The Demand of the Job Market. The 18 female students (7%), who were planning to be teachers, were very eager to find secure and good jobs to make money and improve their life condition. "Education is always a needed major in Lebanon. We need to have many good educators to improve our educational field," summarized it one of the Education majors. The needs of the job market were much more influential on the business students when they selected their major. In this research there were 147 students (59%) who majored in business and business-related majors and minors. As one student said, "I was looking for a major that I could

use in the real world. Business administration provides me with lots of opportunities and lots of variety.”

There were 157 students (63%) who chose majors that were more “open” and flexible because they lead into more career choices. For example, the career journey of 13 students (5%) who majored in biology was to be a teacher or to continue their education in a medical field. As a result of their decision, they were increasing the job opportunities. A student majored in psychology stated that: “After getting my BA I want to teach so that I can earn money to get my Masters of Arts degree.” In fact, according to 114 students (46%), job security, a fixed salary and steady income growth rank higher as a consideration in selecting their major.

Are the students building a realistic view of work and the job market? Yes, the job market played a critical role in shaping the students’ occupational choice or choosing a major. “I know that engineering is much needed in Saudi Arabia where I’m planning to go back and work there,” said one of the students.

The Effect of the Economical Recession. The increasing global complexities of the market economies became a reality. Ninety-five students (38%) in this research were aware of the occupational and marketplace barriers that were going to influence their future career. Students mentioned different kind of problems that might result due to this dilemma. First, the lack of job opportunities, due to the Gulf employees who are returning back to Lebanon, and whose physical residence is Lebanon will be expanding the unemployment crisis. Regardless of these difficulties these students were preparing themselves for the challenges of the new economy. They were depending on their career management skills for multiple roles within one sector to facilitate career searching approaches. For example, one of the students majored in

biology stated that: "Nothing will stop the educational institutions to grow and if I get a teaching career in a good school, I will insure a good future."

On the other hand, there were 54 students (22%) who had different opinions regarding the international economic crisis; they believed that Lebanon has its own "defensive economical" structure, and as a small country it will not get influenced by this problem. A student majored in computer science considered his major an important one in every institution, whereas a student majored in medical laboratory explained that: "Hospitals should always have a complete staff for the work to be done appropriately."

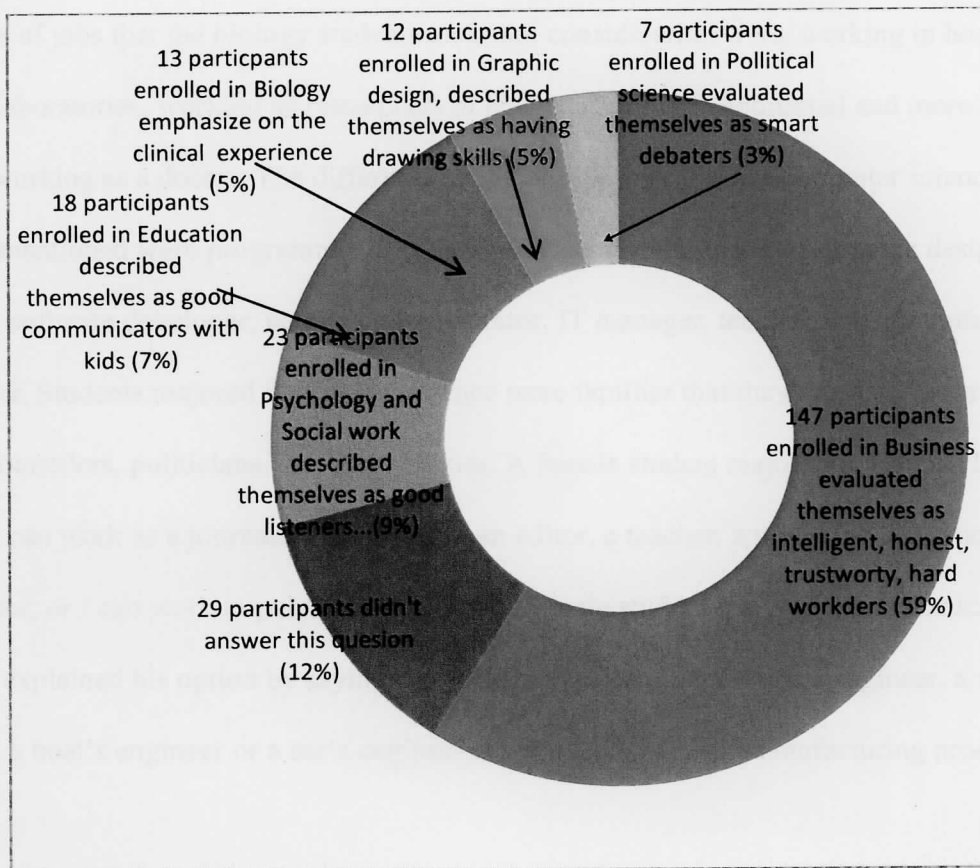
Students' Personal Qualities and Interests

There were 220 participants (88%) who evaluated their skills and emphasized the importance of how accurately their major matched with their abilities. At the same time, they were willing to major in fields that interested and motivated them since, they found them to be more rewarding. Among these participants there were 12 students out of the 220 who majored in advertising, marketing and graphic design who identified their abilities and values as being creative, having drawing skills, and possessing good knowledge of computer. The 147 students out of the 220 participants who majored in business and computer science were already aware that they are hard workers, intelligent, sociable, honest, trustworthy, can handle difficulties and work under pressure, have logical and critical thinking, and they are self-confident. Another 7 students out of 220 participants enrolled in political science assessed themselves as smart debaters, have the ability to convince and persuade, enclose leadership skills, and like working in challenging environments. As one of them said: "I'm a smart and good debater; I have the talent of convincing my point of view."

Another 23 students out of 220 participants who majored in psychology and social work appreciated themselves as good listeners, love to help people, and love to analyze behaviors. Among the 220 participants there were 31 female students who planned to work as teachers rated themselves as being patient and loving children. Finally, in this research, 125 male and female students (50%) who were majored in business, hospitality management and political science distinguished themselves as having leadership skills more than others.

Another important question arises when assessing students' choice of major in the university: Are college students really interested in their major? All the 249 students in this research reported that their initial choice goal was based on their personal interest, and accordingly they were doing what they "like" and "enjoy" the most.

Students' Personal Qualities and Interests

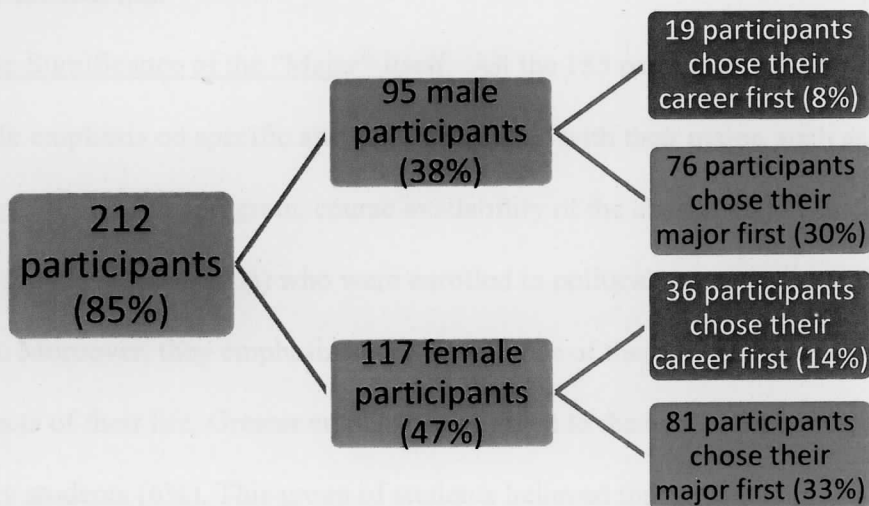
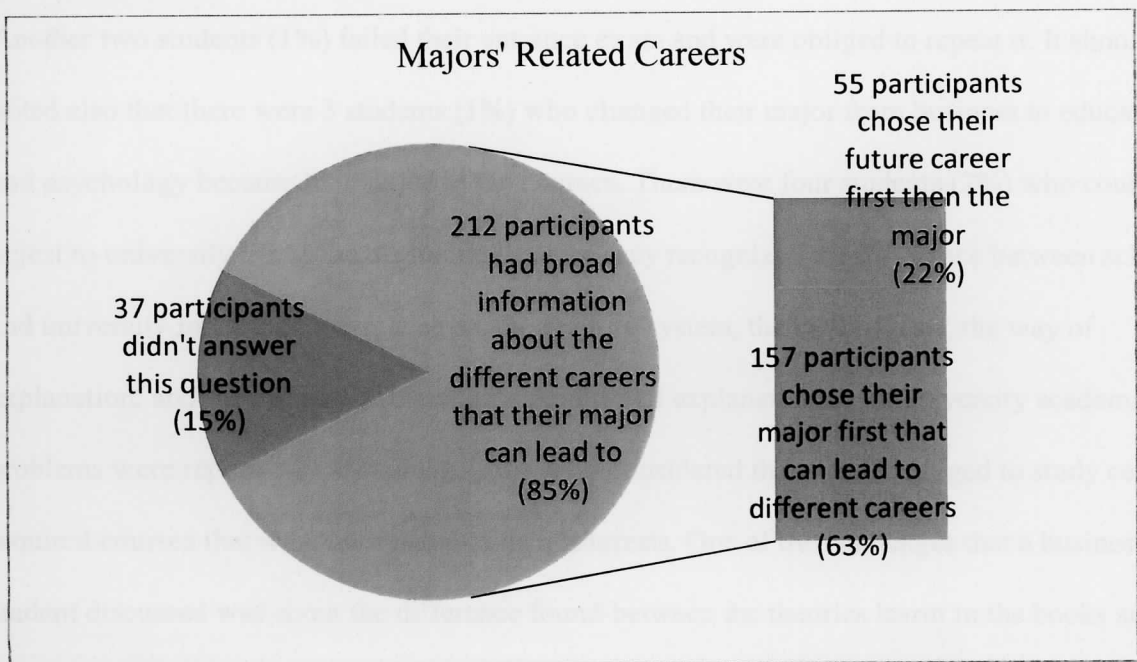


Characteristics of the Chosen Major

Major's Related Careers. Students in this research were aware that choosing a major does not lock them into any particular occupation. Accordingly, students made their choices by considering all the increasing options of employment after graduation.

In this study, we found that most of the students chose majors that can prepare them to a variety of careers and not just to one specific option. Accordingly, 96 male and 116 female participants (85%) revealed having high career information sources about the choices available to them. Many majors such as business, biology or computer science lend themselves to virtually any type of career. Thus, the wide ranges of career options that the business students considered were financial manager or advisor, state manager, broker, bank manager, teacher, banker, accountant, marketer, advertiser, or working in financial institution or manufacturing companies. The types of jobs that the biology students took into consideration were, working in hospitals or medical laboratories, working as researchers or teachers, and with additional and more advanced degrees working as a doctor. The different kind of occupations that the computer science students mentioned were programmer, database manager or administrator, graphic designer, web designer, software developer, network administrator, IT manager, teacher, and computer maintainer. Students majored in political science were familiar that they can work as lawyers, judges, councilors, politicians, and in embassies. A female student majored in English literature stated: "I can work as a journalist, a translator, an editor, a teacher, a writer, an educational coordinator, or I can work in publication houses." A male student majored in mechanical engineer explained his option by saying that: "He can work as an aircraft's engineer, a ship's engineer, a boat's engineer or a car's engineer, he could also design manufacturing products' parts."

Moreover, there were 55 students out of the 212 students who chose a career first and then searched for the majors that could help them to get there. For example, a female student wished for being a counselor in the future so she chose to enroll in a psychology major. Another female student who was already working as an elementary teacher assistant majored in computer science to better enhance her position. Another female stated that: "After assisting social workers that she laid her eyes on the career."



Academic Problems to Adapt to the Chosen Major. There were 57 students (23%) in this research that felt happy and confident about themselves in choosing the major that they like. One student stated: “My major is the best to help me to know who I am, and what will I do.” However, there were few obstacles and academic problems that faced the students after enrolling in their current major in the university. Only two students (1%) mentioned that they had adapting problems due to “emotional barriers” they faced because of a gap between school and university. Another two students (1%) failed their entrance exam and were obliged to repeat it. It should be noted also that there were 3 students (1%) who changed their major from business to education and psychology because they failed in the courses. There were four students (2%) who couldn’t adjust to university life at the beginning because they recognized the difference between school and university in various ways, such as, the grading system, the kind of tests, the way of explanation, and the academic curriculum. Additional explanation about university academic problems were reported by 8 students (3%), who considered themselves obliged to study certain required courses that were not related to their interests. One of the challenges that a business student discussed was about the difference found between the theories learnt in the books and practice in the real life.

The Significance of the “Major” Itself. All the 185 participants (74%) of this research placed little emphasis on specific attributes associated with their major, such as, strengths of the faculty, reputation of the program, course availability of the chosen major, or course variety etc. However, 5 male students (2%) who were enrolled in political science were influenced by their professors. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of their offered courses as they related to every aspects of their life. Greater emphasis was given to the applicability of the major by the 15 psychology students (6%). This group of students believed that psychology is a major that helps

a person to understand one's own personality and other people's behaviors and thoughts. As two of them explained: "I was attracted by the different kinds of theories dealing with psychological disorders," and "Dealing with communities that need help and bringing solutions to their problems was very excited factor for me to choose my major." The 25 students (10%) who majored in biology and MLS placed high emphasis on the clinical experience that the major offers to them. Finally, the 19 students (8%) who were enrolled in advertising, marketing, graphic design and interior architecture set importance on skill formation for creativity and openness to change. As two of them put it: "My university evaluates creativity because of that I chose my major," and "In Advertising and Communication there are many practical analyses in everyday life."

Cultural Influence

One set of the research questionnaire aimed at understanding the effect of cultural values on student's choice of university major. The following section, entitled "Cultural influenced is divided into three categories: (1) Traditional values, (2) Religious/Ethnic issues and (3) Personal goals and values.

Traditional Values

Around two-thirds (158 students, 63%) of the students reported that cultural values had no influence on their choice of major, and as one student mentioned: "The cultural values limit the future career capabilities."

Only 91 students (37%) stated that their cultural values were important factors that were taken into consideration while choosing their major in the university. One student, majoring in

banking and finance, declared that: “He’s continuing his grandparents’ vision because they had the same degree too.” Yet, another student who was enrolled in psychology went further and explained that: “One of her cultural values is based on cooperation and interdependence, so she thinks through her major she can have the ability to reinforce those qualities.” A third student emphasized his commitment to his values by saying that “His cultural values do not change even if there are huge business opportunities.”

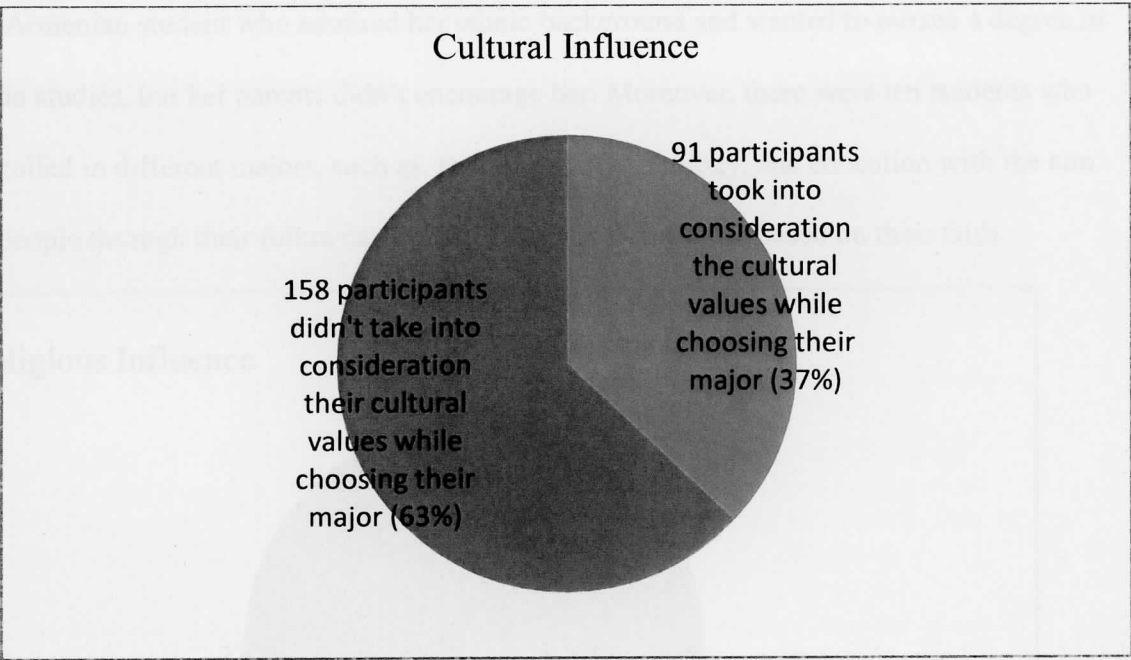
There was an effect of the cultural values on 26 student’s (out of the 91 students) concept of career choice success, since they stated that their personal values were based on their cultural values. For example they were seeking decent careers, where they can work while keeping their integrity, dignity and honesty.

Another 18 students out of the 91 students who chose teaching as their future career mentioned that their chosen major – Education- supports their cultural values. Two of these stated the following about their “education” major: “Education supports my cultural values and teaching reflects it.” and “Education supports the culture you live in and so everything you teach reflects your culture and gives the opportunity to respect other cultures.” For these students it was very important to keep on carrying one’s own cultural values in order to have a strong and high valued society within a new generation.

Furthermore, there were 4 students out of the 91 students who were raised in Saudi Arabia and were very strongly affected by their cultural values. For these students, preserving their cultural values while choosing their major in the university was always a priority.

The personal values of 3 students out of the 91 students, whose major is social science, were helping people, children and families who need help. Thus, these students were reflecting their own cultural values through their current major and future career.

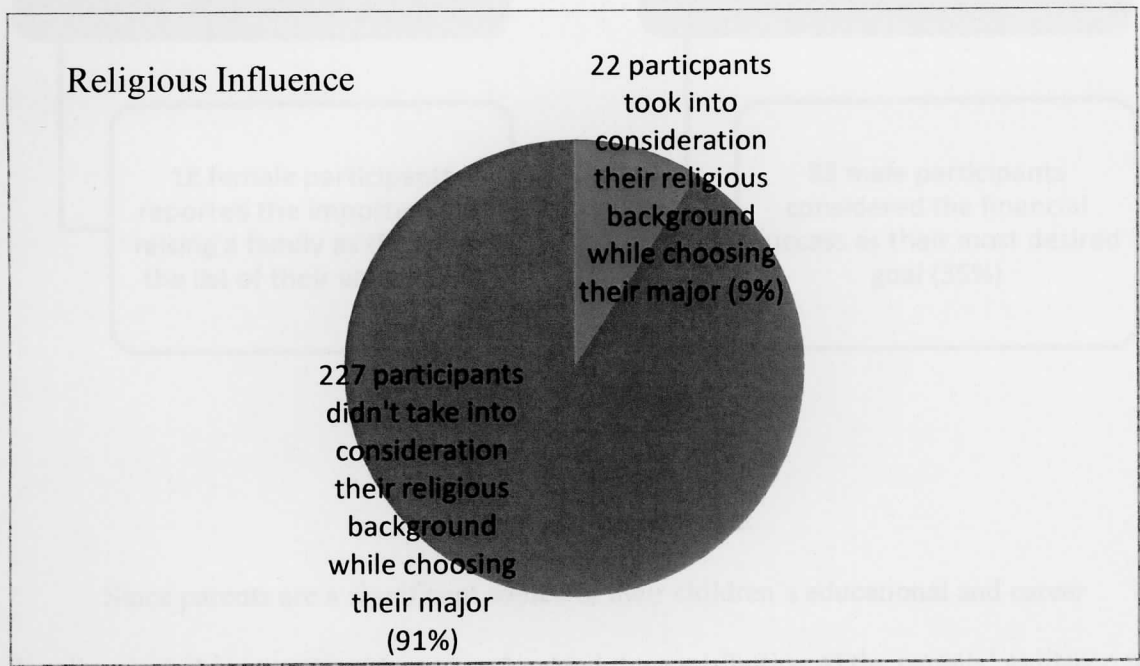
Finally, 2 Armenian students out of the 91 students who are majoring in political science confirmed that their choice of major was surely based on their cultural values which included helping their people. These were their exact statements: “As an Armenian we have a case; the Genocide, so hopefully I want to help my people.” and “My major supports my cultural values, since if I go along I might represent my culture and my community in the parliament.”



Religious/Ethnic Issues

In this research the students’ level of cultural awareness varied because they are from different ethnic backgrounds and with different family histories. The majority of the students (91%) didn’t believe that religious beliefs and/or ethnic background should influence their choice of major in the university, as one student said: “Our choice should not be based on our religion.” Yet, another student’s opinion was that religion and ethnic background have their influence on her total life but not on her choice of major.

Only 22 students (9%) expressed their faith and the relationship between their religious beliefs and their choice of major in the university. For example, one student majoring in computer science stated that he “always thought he needed to use his computer to express his faith.” Among these 22 students there were 3 Armenian students who chose their university namely Haigazian University, according to their ethnic background. There was, however, another Armenian student who admired her ethnic background and wanted to pursue a degree in Armenian studies, but her parents didn’t encourage her. Moreover, there were ten students who were enrolled in different majors, such as, social work, psychology, and education with the aim to help people through their future careers as Christians living a life based on their faith.

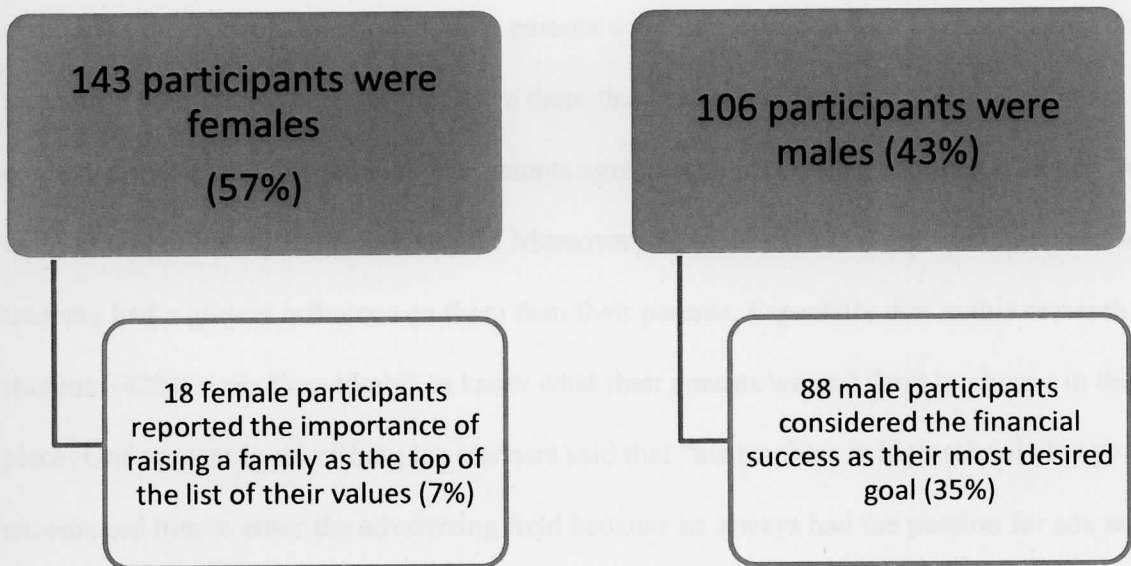


Personal Goals and Values

In spite of the differences in cultures, some students’ career choice decisions related more to personal goals, such as, personal happiness, being financially secure, and satisfaction with their future career. Specifically, 18 females (7%), who were majoring in Education, reported the

importance of raising a family as the top of the list of their values, whereas 88 males (35%) in this research, who were majoring in variety of majors, considered the financial success as their most desired goal.

The personal goals and values that were taken into consideration during decision making process

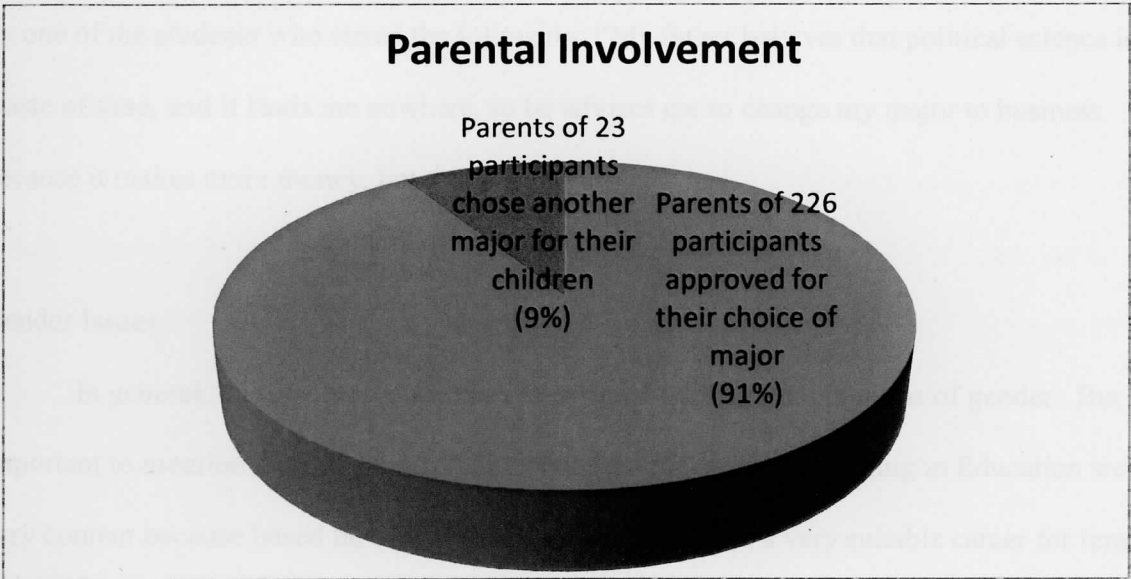


Parental Involvement

Since parents are a significant source in their children's educational and career development, it is very important to understand the contribution of the parents' guidance on the students' university choices and career decisions. This section is divided into: (1) Parental support, (2) Parental concerns, (3) Gender issues, (4) The impact of parental educational background, (5) Relationship between parents' occupation and students' chosen major and (6) Socioeconomic status of families.

Parental Support

The result in this research showed that the effect of the parental involvement is not-significant. As one student put it “My parents agreed on my choice as long as I’m studying what I like, and getting a degree is more important for them than the choice of my major.” The majority of the students, specifically 226 students (91%) reported that their parents approved of their choices, and they weren’t influential in the university major choosing process or career choice. As the students mentioned, their parents were supportive as well as encouraging and respecting their choice because they gave them the freedom to decide for their own future. In this context, another student said that “her parents agreed with her choice, and they believed that she will use all her talents to be successful.” Moreover, 43 students (17%) reported that their school teachers had a greater influence on them than their parents. Especially that in this research 105 students (42%) were “less likely” to know what their parents wanted them to choose in the first place. One student in describing his teachers said that “his teachers in high school always encouraged him to enter the advertising field because he always had the passion for ads and graphics.”



Parental Concerns

There were 23 students (9%) in this research who reported that, despite of their parents' desires to choose another major for them, they enrolled in the major that was based on their own choosing. Among these parents there were those who were concerned about the lack of job opportunities in the future and the low payment of salaries. For example, one parent preferred computer science over chemistry for his son because he thought that working in a laboratory or even teaching in the future does not create great opportunities for advancement. Another parent's favorite major was pharmacy because he wished his daughter to have her own pharmacy instead of working in others' companies after graduating from business administration. This young woman explained her father's position by stating that he was a graduate of the medical school and therefore "he encouraged her to enroll in biology; however, she chose business administration."

Another parent's point of view was that their daughter who is majoring in psychology is obliged to continue a Masters of Arts degree to be able to find a rewarding job in this field. In other words, it will be long before she graduates. Let me end this section with another quotation by one of the students who stated the following: "My father believes that political science is a waste of time, and it leads me nowhere, so he advises me to change my major to business because it makes more money, but this is impossible."

Gender Issues

In general, there was no difference in parental involvement in terms of gender. But it is important to mention that 18 parents (7%) whose daughters were majoring in Education were very content because based on their point of view, teaching is a very suitable career for females

in the future. Moreover, these students' criteria for their choice of major and their career in the future were based on factors related to aspects of family life, such as facilities for child rearing and working hours, as one young woman explained: "Teaching is suitable for me because if I get married and have children, I will spend my summer vacation and the holidays with them."

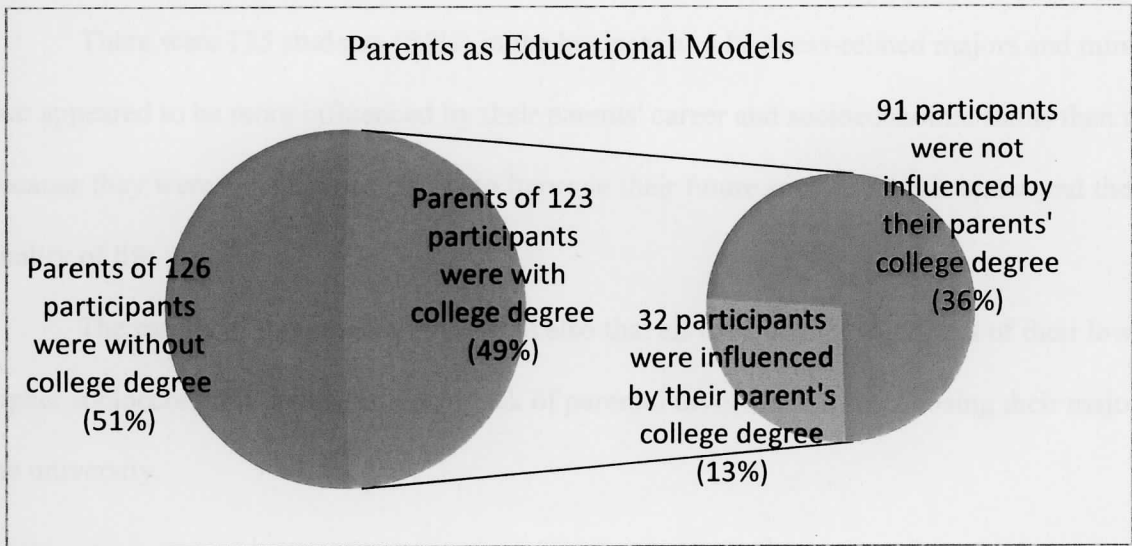
Finally, there was no gender discrimination regarding the type of major the students were enrolled in. Parents didn't classify the majors as male or female respectively; on the contrary, they recognized the equality between males and females, as one student put it: "This idea is very narrow-minded and old fashioned."

The Impact of Parental Educational Background

Parental encouragement concerning students' university major choosing process appears to be similar for the students' whose parents have graduated from college and whose parents who have only reached elementary or high school level, since students are generally encouraged to freely select the major related to their own interests. In spite of all the 249 students' parental educational background, parental encouragement related only to university enrollment, and regardless of the level of mother's and father's education attainment, parental encouragement influenced students' degree aspirations rather than advising for a particular major. Moreover, all the students reported their parents' involvement in terms of their future employment availability. Finally, students of both types of parents reported lack of communication with their parents concerning their educational orientation, but this lack of parental involvement for university major selection, didn't seem problematic for them.

Parents as Educational Models

In this research, there were 123 students (49%) whose parents had college degrees; (58 students had their father and mother with a college degree, 36 students had their father only with a college degree and 29 students had their mother only with a college degree). Among these students, there were 11 males and 9 females who were influenced by their father’s major, especially those who had college degrees in business and biology. For example, one student cited that “His dad agreed with his choice of major because he knows that the demand of business is too much in the job market.” Another 3 male and 4 female students out of the 123 were influenced by their mother’s career, especially those who had college degrees in business and psychology. In this context two students stated: “Since I knew from my mom that everything we need requires accounting.” and “My mom is majored in psychology and she encouraged me.” Finally, there were 3 male and 2 female students out of the 123 who were attracted by their father’s and mother’s college degree, such as, business and medical lab, because both parents had the same university degree. One of them stated the following: “I liked business because both my father and mother are in the field.”



Socioeconomic Status of Families

There were 92 students (37%) who were from families with financial difficulties. Among these students, 37 students mentioned that this fact didn't influence their decision-making process. But there were 3 students out of the 92 who began their major in a university, but because of many financial difficulties, they changed eventually their university and their major. As one student put it, "I changed my major from biology to education and to another university because I will get more financial aid there." The low socioeconomic status of 36 families out of the 92 affected their children's choice of university. They chose a university which had low-priced credits. "My family's financial status limited my choice of university and narrowed my options of different majors," said one of the students.

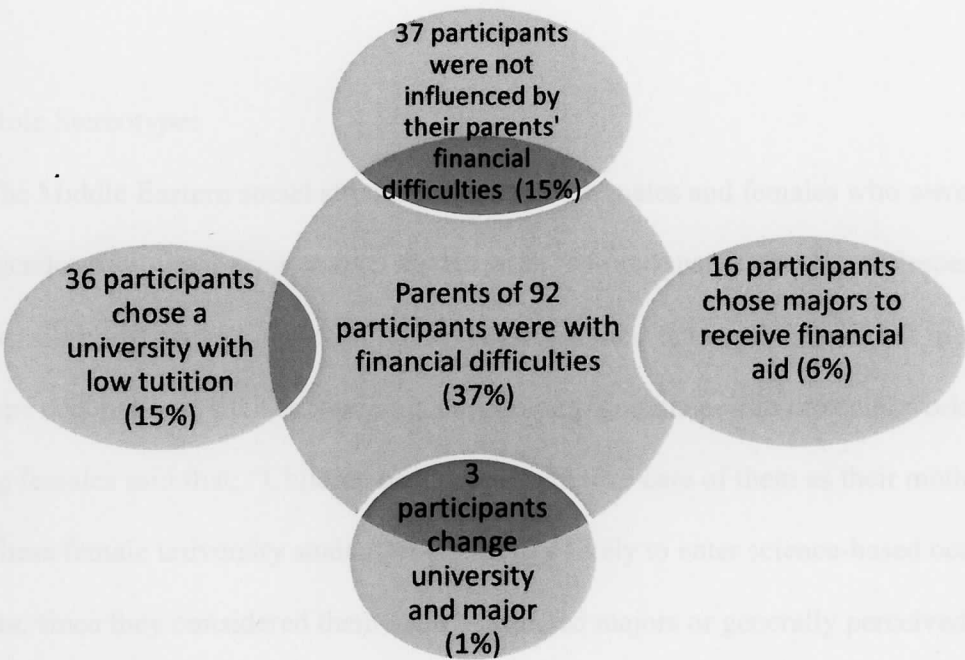
Another 16 students out of the 92 chose majors which allowed them to receive help from the financial aid office, specifically students who majored in education, psychology or social work. As one psychology major explains: "My first choice of major was theater but my parents' couldn't afford to pay for another university, so I chose my second best major which is psychology and totally in another university."

There were 135 students (54%) in the business and business-related majors and minors that appeared to be more influenced by their parents' career and socioeconomic status than others because they were trying to put efforts to improve their future socioeconomic status and their quality of life.

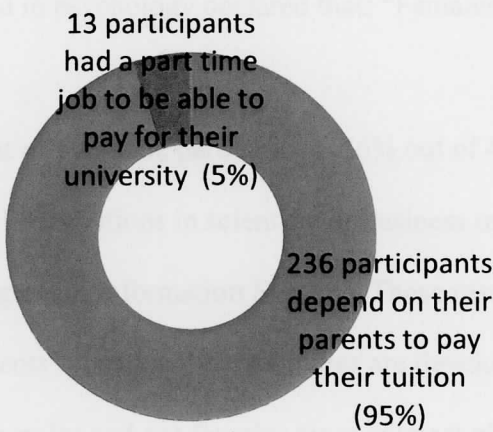
The results of this research indicated also that all the students regardless of their lower or higher socioeconomic status, reflected lack of parental involvement for choosing their major in the university.

To end with, it was obvious that the majority of the students (95%) depend on their parents financially in paying their university fees. Only 13 students (5%) mentioned that they had a part time job to be able to pay for their university.

Socioeconomic Status of Families



Paying University Tuition



Gender Influence

Gender is one of the most important factors that influenced more participants' educational aspirations and expectations for their future career development. My results reported differences across gender among the students while choosing their major in the university as well as differences in how they are involved in education and decision making processes.

Gender Role Stereotypes

The Middle Eastern social structure affected both males and females who were aspired towards gender-traditional occupations. My research reported that 60 female adolescents out of the 143 female participants (24% out of 57%) restricted their range of occupations in social or artistic type occupations; such as, teaching, psychology, graphic design or social work. One of the young females said that: "Children need females to take care of them as their mother."

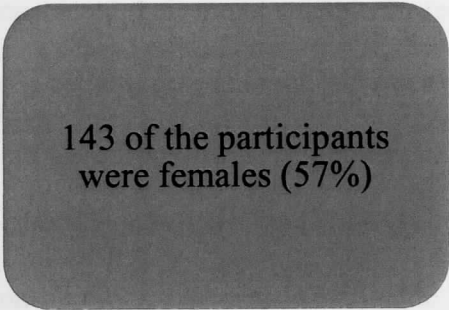
These female university students were far less likely to enter science-based occupations than males, since they considered them male dominated majors or generally perceived them as too masculine. For example, one of the students majored in sociology reported: "Females are more social and like to work with problematic people than males."

Another female student majored in psychology declared that: "Females tend to be more caring and sensitive to other's needs."

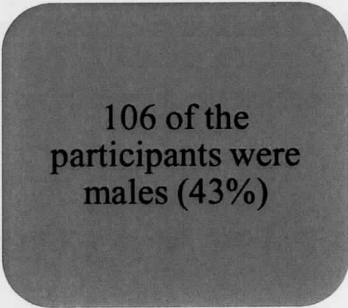
There were 90 males out of 106 male participants (36% out of 43%) who also limited themselves in gender traditional occupations in scientific or business majors; such as: computer science, finance or MIS (Management Information System). These results confirm that gender differences exist while the students' vocational personalities are developing. As one male student stated that politics is mostly for males and not females since "almost all the politicians in

Lebanon are males.” Moreover, all the male students (106 participants) in this research were more likely to choose majors with higher earning potential than female students.

Gender issues in major choosing process



- 60 participants of the females chose social or artistic type of majors (24%)



- 90 participants of the males chose scientific or business type majors (36%)

Factors Associated with Gender Differences

Many factors were related to gender differences in the choice of major. Females chose teaching as their future career because it doesn’t overwhelm their domestic responsibilities. The teaching job has many advantages, such as, summer vacation, maternity rights, and an appropriate daily schedule. In addition, education majors specifically have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and experience needed to guide and raise their own children. Moreover, among the 4 female students (2%) who majored in computer science only one chose teaching in the future influenced by all the previous mentioned aspects. The other 3 students considered computer science suitable for males only because all the programmers are males. As to the 23

female students (9%) who chose psychology and social work, they reported they were suitable majors for females because females are more sensitive than males in coping with others' problems. Another 10 female participants (4%) who majored in medical laboratory and business, considered their major suitable for females because it doesn't require hard physical work but only helping people in the laboratories. It is important to mention that 63 female (2%) students, who were from low SES families, had the most valued forms of social beliefs in comparison to males; for instance, they believed in the importance of working with people and making contributions to society. Finally, the 7 students (3%), 5 males and 2 females, who majored in political science considered it suitable for males, because the majority of the politicians are males and Lebanon is a male dominated country.

Students' Perception of their Future Workplace

Both males and females were eager to get a job especially once they graduate. In this research there were only 8 male and 16 female students (10%) who mentioned that they don't have the aspiration to work with the opposite gender. "I don't feel comfortable working with men; I think it's too hard," said one of the young women.

On the other hand, 225 students (90%) had no problem working with the opposite gender. They believed that both genders are equal and should respect each other. Besides, 85 male students out of the 106 male participants (34%) presumed that careers and occupations should not reflect gender discrimination. They believed that careers should be associated with one's abilities, skills and performance capabilities. "I'm already working with females; I don't have any problem, because I'm an open minded person, and I like to share each others' experience," said a young man.

Financial Consideration

Financial considerations are viewed as a specific job characteristic for the students in this research, because it appears that they are strongly influenced by the availability of jobs and the earnings related to it while they were choosing their major. As one student stated it: "What made me choose this major is that I am doing something that I enjoy and allows me to achieve financial security." Another student said it more bluntly: "Job satisfaction would be important, but so would the money that the job provides."

Occupational Aspirations

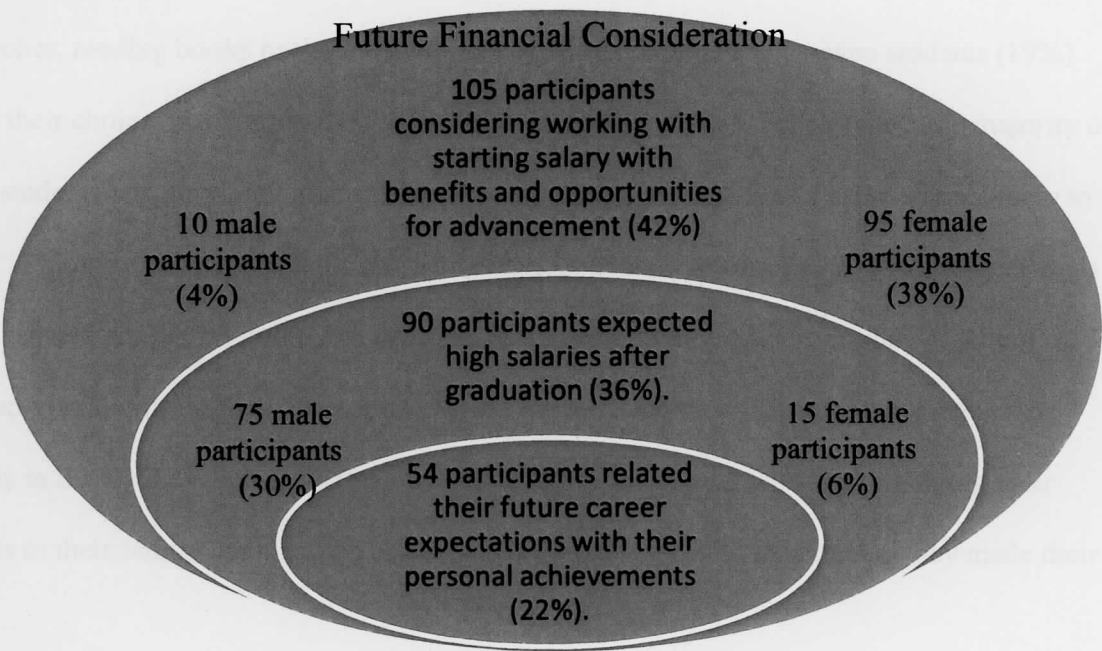
In this research the financial aspects of a job that 105 students (42%) were considering, included a starting salary, benefits and then opportunities for advancement. "I would preferably choose a fixed job in an advertising company with additional commission and profit," stated one student.

Although the importance of the financial security and having nice things in life were the most important aspects for the females in this research, yet at the same time the type of work was also an essential factor when they enter the world of work. For example, 70 female students (28%) wished for working in fixed jobs. This could be summed up with the following two quotations: "Teaching provides me with a fixed salary," and "I am aiming for a comfortable, stable financial situation." While all these students believed that the local market needs of Lebanon are very limited because of the many graduates, every year they were still optimistic that new job availabilities will be created to resolve the unemployment problem.

Future Income Expectations

Students were taking many factors into consideration such as; the financial aspects of a job; the starting salary, high earnings potential, benefits, opportunities for advancement, and quality of life issues. As for the males, they rated financial success more important than females, because they viewed themselves as the primary bread winners of their future families. “I want to earn enough money to ensure a good and happy life for me and my family” said one of the male students. Perhaps financial success is more noticeable to seniors because very soon they will be making a transition to a professional work environment. “My first aim is to be financially independent from my parents,” clarified a senior.

In this research, 90 students (36%) expected high salaries after graduation, because they were planning to “raise families, enjoy life and save money.” Another 54 students (22%) were more “realistic” regarding their future income salary; they were relating their career expectations with their personal achievements. These students’ choice of major was from the humanities; such as education, social work or psychology, and they were very aware that their future career will not be well paid as science and business occupations.



Career Information Search

In this research, many students relied on different sources of information in making their major choice decision, whereas others depended on their fondness with the chosen major and their personal interests, as long as all the chosen majors lead to jobs.

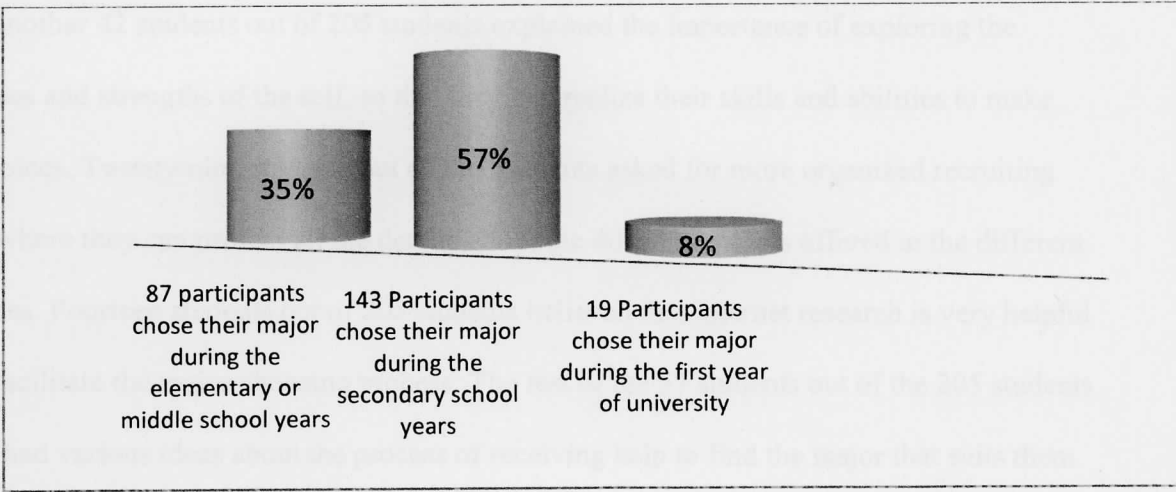
Means for Career Decision-Making Process

In this research, students reported little counseling services available in both public and private educational settings. However, there were 21 students (8%) who emphasized the recommendations of their parents, 10 students (4%) indicated the recommendations of their relatives, and 19 students (8%) indicated the recommendations of their friends. For instance, one of the students said: "I got a feel for biology major from my uncle, who is working as a doctor." On the other hand, 43 students (17%) indicated that the recommendations of their school teachers influenced them strongly during the high school years while they were searching for a major. However, there were 28 students (11%) who mentioned receiving help through orientation programs. Others (29 students, 12%) relied on themselves through internet researches, reading books or the media to make their decisions. Forty-seven students (19%) based their choice of major on their school academic high grades. For instance, the majority of these students had very high grades in science so the impact of this fact affected positively to major in biology or in a medical field. Moreover, students who excelled in other subject areas at school shared similar remarks. For instance, "I had very high grades in English at school, so I decided to major in English language." We also have to mention that 8 students (3%) were already in the field of their major in a way or another. They were working or helping their parents in their family business, so according to their background experience, they made their

choice of major that best fits their current or future career. For example, one of the students who majored in education stated that, “She has been teaching and working with children for 10 years, so she guessed that the major was a familiar one.” In conclusion, all these 205 students (82%) chose their major because they “like” it, “are interested” in it and they wanted to study something that they will “enjoy.”

There were 143 students (57%) who declared that they decided for their major during the secondary levels. They were affected by the university orientation programs that were presented in an influential way, or attracted to certain careers when the school organized special trips, or simply they were interested in specific courses related to their chosen major. For instance, one student stated that: “She has got high grades in biology so she decided to enroll in this major.” Also, there were 19 students (8%) who reported not having made a university major choosing decision until the first year of the university. Their advisors, the professors and the university counselor were all good helpers. “I took a career test in high school, but the main reason for choosing English literature was by the help of my university professor during the first year,” said a female student.

The stage level of University Major Choosing Process



Career Counseling Services in Schools

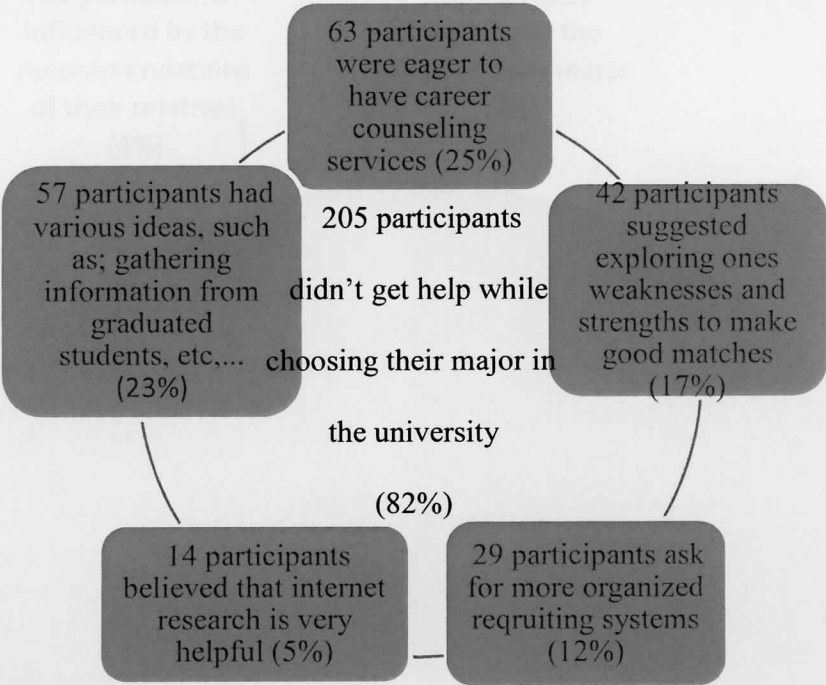
Only 44 students (18%) revealed to have received effective counseling services during the high school years or during the first year of the university. These counselors played a central role in guiding the students in their decision making process of choosing a major. These high school counselors were assisting students through different techniques, for example they were helping them to choose the appropriate university, they were conducting different career tests, and they were eliminating the majors that were not related to the students' skills and abilities, and discussing different kinds of majors for the students to choose from.

On the other hand, there were 205 students (82%) who didn't get any kind of help or counseling services in their school. Among these group 63 students were eager to have career counseling services in their schools and complete a career or a personality test to recognize the major that fits them the best. The following were two statements reflecting the importance of career counseling in schools: "Counselors in the schools should help the students by showing them the way how to choose their majors, and where to apply," and "Students should be helped through good and early career counseling services, and by being exposed to as many majors and careers."

Another 42 students out of 205 students explained the importance of exploring the weaknesses and strengths of the self, so that they can realize their skills and abilities to make easier choices. Twenty-nine students out of 205 students asked for more organized recruiting systems where they can present all the details about the different majors offered in the different universities. Fourteen students out of 205 students believed that internet research is very helpful and can facilitate the major choosing process. The rest of the 57 students out of the 205 students however had various ideas about the process of receiving help to find the major that suits them

best. For example gathering information from previously graduated students of that major; exploring the careers in the real field; and taking into consideration the demand of the job market.

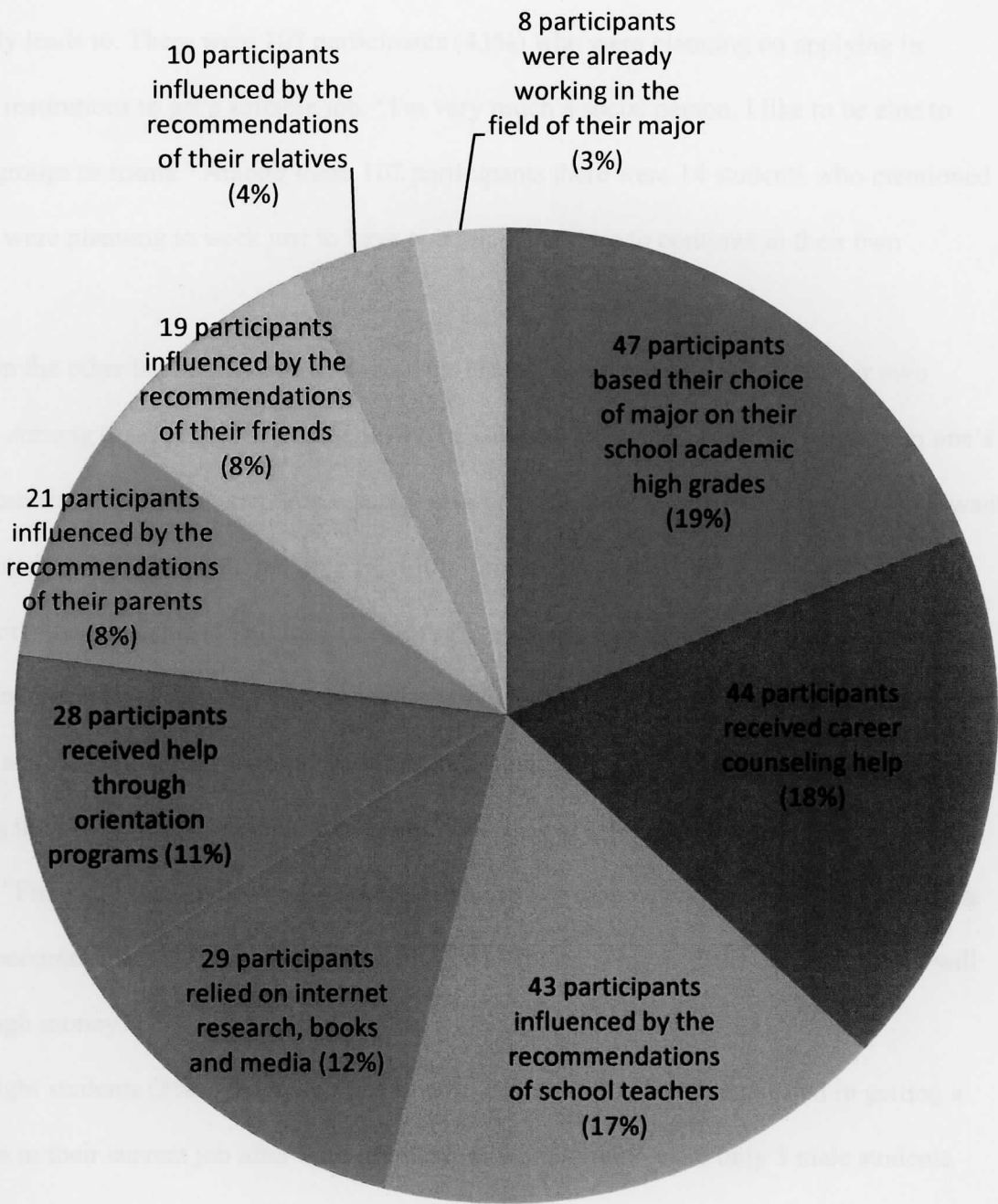
Students’ suggestions to get help to find the major that suits them best



Plans for Choosing University Major

It was very important to assess the different components of a major that were important to the students’ own satisfaction. A total of 68 students (27%) had their own criteria for choosing their major in the university. Among this group 35 students took into consideration the future job opportunities. The different reasons that the other 33 students mentioned can be organized in two categories: extrinsic motivation, such as, the importance of making money, high earnings and having a secure, prestigious, and respected occupation. Or intrinsic motivation which included being independent by having their own business, avoiding pressure or working with people and making contribution to the society.

Career Information Search



Students' Future Plans

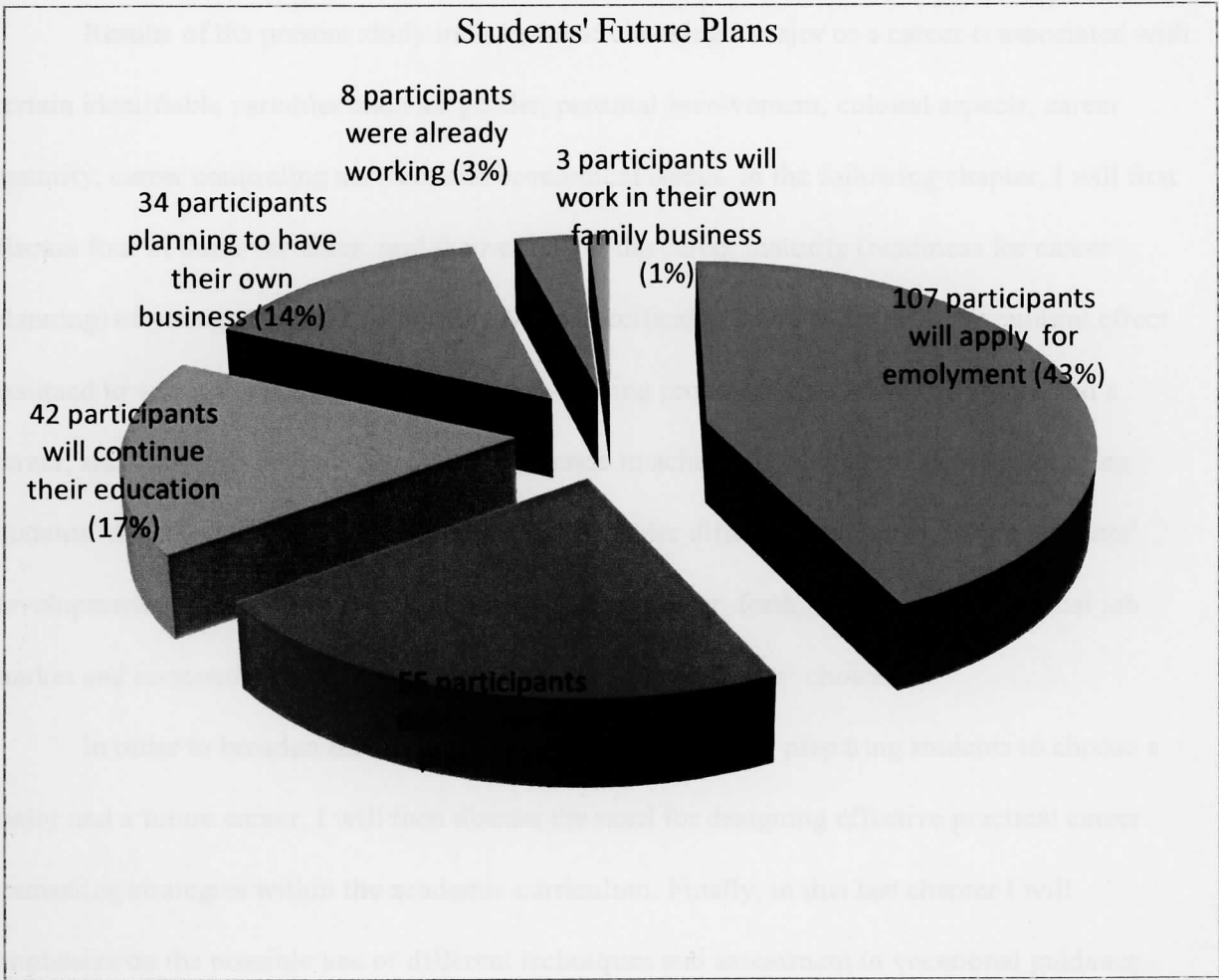
The results of this qualitative study suggest that many students were influenced by the importance of future benefits resulting from their major selection and the job that the major eventually leads to. There were 107 participants (43%) who were planning on applying in different institutions to get a suitable job. "I'm very much a social person. I like to be able to work in groups or teams." Among these 107 participants there were 14 students who mentioned that they were planning to work just to have enough experience to continue in their own business.

On the other hand, there were 34 students (14%) who were preparing for their own business. Among this group was a student who mentioned the social benefit of working in one's own business so that he can support his social network (e.g. family, friends, or relatives). "I want to have my own business with trustable friends or family."

Forty-two students (17%) took into consideration the changeable demands of the job market, and because of that they expressed the need to continue their education after securing a good job and making money to improve the human condition. These students also were planning on having their own business in the future. The following are two statements by two of the students: "Financial security is what I expect. Hopefully in time when I get my Masters of Arts degree I become financially more independent," and "If I open my daycare center I think I will earn enough money."

Eight students (3%) who were already working were very much interested in getting a promotion in their current job after their graduation. Finally, there were only 3 male students (1%) who didn't have to worry about their future because they had their own family business to

continue. One of the students summarized it very clearly: “My Dad owns a big company and when I graduate my place is saved in my father’s company. Because of that I chose my major.”



CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Results of the present study indicated that choosing a major or a career is associated with certain identifiable variables such as, gender, parental involvement, cultural aspects, career maturity, career counseling services and economical issues. In the following chapter, I will first discuss four of these variables, and their effect on the career maturity (readiness for career planning) of young students in Lebanon. More specifically, I will begin with the cultural effect assigned to various occupations and decision-making processes for choosing a major and a career, second, I will analyze the family influence in achieving insight and clarity regarding students' decisions, third, I will elaborate on the gender difference dilemma during students' developmental stages while selecting their preferred career, forth, I will explain the local job market and economical problems that exert pressure on students' choices.

In order to broaden the understanding of the schools for preparing students to choose a major and a future career, I will then discuss the need for designing effective practical career counseling strategies within the academic curriculum. Finally, in this last chapter I will emphasize on the possible use of different techniques and assessment in vocational guidance during the process of career counseling during every developmental stage.

Career Maturity in Decision-Making Process

According to Super's (1990) developmental theory career maturity refers to students' readiness to make informed and age appropriate career decisions. Also, career maturity implies independent thought and planning (Watson, 2005). However, many factors influence career

maturity, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, cultural and family structure, economical context, intelligence, and grade point average (Patton & Creed, 2001).

Regarding the relation of career maturity with age, it should increase as students get older and progress through the school academic levels. In my study, there was a progression related to age and class standing, since the planning activities of 143 students (57%) for choosing their major in the university began when they were in the secondary classes. On the other hand, few participants (19 students, 8%) had difficulties, and couldn't make a decision until after high school graduation.

As about gender differences on career maturity, in Patton and Creed's (2001) research females reflected more career maturity since they were more convinced on their choices than the males. But in my study it was clear that both males and females in several age groups revealed certainty about their career choices, because they had consistent occupational knowledge.

Occupational choices and a university major choosing process are clearly associated with academic achievements that have their impact also on career maturity. Such as, in this study 47 students (19%) who reported achieving well at school, had higher self-esteem and more career determination. With reference to Flouri & Buchanan (2002) adolescents who had a role model and work-related skills reported high career maturity during their decision making process. In my study, a simple role model effect of the mother and/or the father figure seemed to be operating as an explanation for 33 students' (13%) choice of major. For example, a student reported about his father as an important person he looked up to and majored in biology because his father was a doctor. Moreover, in this study having basic work-related skills was more important predictor of career maturity than the socioeconomic status of the students.

Finally, career maturity is a continuous developmental process (Zunker, 2002) and examining the structure of career maturity of school age children is an important task.

Role of Culture in Counseling

Culture is related to many aspects of life, such as, customs, activities, heritage and tradition, rules and norms, behavioral approaches, set of attitudes, values, and beliefs shared by a group of people (Zunker, 2002). At the same time, cultures transmit set of values to their members to guide them during their growing developmental process in their social environment, such as, problem-solving modes, decision-making processes, or time orientation. The recognition of all these aspects of one's cultural structure helps in adapting in various life roles.

Students in my research represented a variety of family structures and different cultural community systems. Many students reported how they settle on the unique specific measures that shape their values and how their decisions were partly based on their perception of these values. As a result, according to them their choice of university major was the one that suits them best in their society.

The Asian American high school students in Mau's (2004) research, from a collective-oriented cultural background made their decision based on families and social expectations because collectivism emphasize on moderating one's interests and choices based on feelings of involvement and belongingness. In the same token, the Armenian students in my research were more stringent to their culture and reflected more bonds and attachment to their values, especially those who majored in political science because their first aim was based on working to defend the Armenian lawsuit that was interested in defending the lost rights of the Armenian people during the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

My research examined also the possible effects of values and belief systems on career choices that are unique to the different Lebanese subcultures and the diverse religions. Although religion has played an important role in the life of Middle Eastern adolescents to shape their identity (Mideast & N. Africa Encyclopedia, 2004), but interestingly, it didn't play a central role in the decision making process of the students' in this research and it was one of the life goals that was rated as least important for them; since males and females placed little emphasize on religion and they didn't relate university majors and future careers to religion.

How do values influence on students' decision making process? First, students should identify their family values and cultural ideals and understand that they play an important role in shaping their identity formation. The Black and Latino adolescents in Constantine, et al.'s (2007) research, appreciated family values and took into consideration parental expectations because of close family ties. Second, students should reveal these values during their decision making process and convert them into career options to achieve realistic goals. Such as in Kibbi's (1995) research, a number of Lebanese students reported their desire to look for a prestigious career.

Counselors are being challenged to become culturally aware and understand other's perspectives (Zunker, 2002), as well as accept and respect students' cultures. The career counselor should be cognizant of multicultural issues and should: identify environmental barriers (O'Brien, 2001), design and conduct interventions appropriate to local culture (Hartung, 2002), adopt appropriate counseling techniques that better fit students' culture, use non traditional interventions, try to leap over the old boundaries of the culture to incorporate into the new technological world by introducing range of varieties.

Parental Influence on Students' Selection of a College Major

Learning about parental involvement could help explain the post-secondary educational decisions of adolescents, and contribute to knowledge about conditions that foster career outcomes. Although not all the parents in this research were knowledgeable about the characteristics of the higher educational system, (51% didn't attend college), yet they encourage their children to attend college and choose the major they like best, as they had high expectations for their children's educational and occupational attainment. Besides, parents generally expect their children to aspire for higher social positions (Guichard, 2003), and students in the present study viewed their parents, who had less than a high school education, as an example of what life may be like if they do not pursue higher education.

The results in both this study and in Gibbons et al.'s (2006) research reported that the school counselors were among the least helpful with students' future plans because there was a lack of school counselors in the schools. But, unlike the results in Tan's (1998) research, where the influence of the school teacher on choosing a major in the university was far less than that of the parents, the results of this study showed that teachers were very helpful in highlighting the capabilities of the students to choose the major that fits them best.

In addition, the parental involvement in this research and in Carter's (2000) research did not identify parents' motivation for treating daughters and sons differently.

Education-career planning should target parents to help them become involved in their children's educational and career development. There are many approaches for this purpose, for example, incorporating parents into intervention plans (Mei et al., 2008) through participating in the consultation sessions, to join the role playing, and to watch video tapes (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004). In addition, the career counselor should educate parents about helping their children to

choose a “good” major (the major that is best capable of helping the student to achieve their goals) for them not for themselves (Mullins-Beggs, 2008). This can be done when parents regularly ask their children about their college-related plans and activities (Rowan-Kenyon, 2008), because home-based involvement, in which parents discuss educational and career related matters with their children, had significant effect on students’ postsecondary educational success (Trusty, 2004). Finally, career counselors should take students and their parents to job fairs or places of employment, to help parents to make powerful vocational support (Turner et al., 2008).

Gender-Role Development in Career Counseling

The issue of women stereotyping and dissuading females from choosing a traditionally “masculine role” still exist. In fact, gender bias occurs sometimes in career counseling when women are discouraged from choosing jobs that were reserved for men only, whereas, males are strengthened in their efforts to manage clearly their masculine roles.

According to Zunker (2002), career roles for boys and girls are influenced by five factors: first, the cultural influence, which considers parenting and spouse-support regarding the females and breadwinning regarding the males; second, the differential parental expectations that influence students’ career choices; third, the school influence where the teachers treat boys and girls differently; forth, media influence, such as, the masculine and feminine gender-role stereotypes that are represented in the advertisements; fifth, the influence of the children’s books where the stereotyped gender-roles are reinforced.

Accordingly, a message to the career counselors is quite clear; they need to encourage students as much as possible to explore gender-neutral occupations, by giving more consideration to career counseling approaches that are free of male or female dominated roles

(Chope, 2007). In addition, they should foster equal opportunities in providing career training programs and career exploration for both male and female students. Moreover, career fair attendance should be encouraged by counselors as it will increase the interest of the students towards non traditional careers (Kolodinsky et al., 2006). Finally, the career counselor should discuss with the students how they can overcome the barriers to gain entry into the cross-gender occupations. According to Auger (2005), in order to shape students' experience in choosing occupations dominated by the opposite gender, they should have the opportunity to be in contact with these adults. For example, students who are exposed to male nurses or female construction workers will aspire more to nontraditional careers.

As to the Middle Eastern women in the past, they were tracked towards choosing majors in the social sciences or humanities. In this research, however, one can note a slight change as more females choose science and mathematics as specialization areas. However, they reported that they were more likely to enter the teaching field because it provides a perfect harmony and balance to their future life as housewife and mother. The same outcome was evident also in Song and Glick's (2004) research, since women were less likely to pick college majors with higher earning potentials. In addition, making money was not their only priority when making career-related choices because they are expected to make more job accommodations to family life than men. So, I have to conclude that still the general trend of major or career choices for the females in my research was in the "feminine" fields such as education, social work or psychology.

Can these findings be understood as showing that males have a career advantage over females? Probably! That's why; it is of major importance to have a career counselor who implements an intervention that helps to introduce different lifestyle opportunities and demands for males and females.

The Economic Benefits of Career Guidance

It is very essential to take into consideration the nature of the local economical problems and their complicated structure while choosing one's future career, in order to achieve success and satisfaction. There are always big shifts occurring in the structure of the labor markets because of the new and expanding industries, and changes in technology (Mauer & Gysbers, 1990). Moreover, the changing global labor market is placing new and greater demands upon the future generation, so students need high quality of occupational information and career exploration on which they can base their decisions to adjust to the labor market.

The results of the current study also converge with Duffly and Sedlacek's (2007) research, since in both studies the goals of the male students were more aspired towards high earnings, while females were getting more into careers related with people and contributing to society, regardless of their socio-economical level. In The Middle Eastern culture, the male students are highly overweighing the financial aspects of a career because it is expected of them to take care of their parents in their old age.

In light of the changes affecting the job market, schools must provide career planning services to stay apace with the ever-changing job market (St. John, 2000). Plus, the demands of the job market should be one of the main determinants of the university major choosing process. The career counselor should have an important contribution in helping students to understand the remarkable changes of the labor market that have its impact on their decision and then adapt to the local economy. Also, different programs and activities should be introduced to the students to increase their awareness about the different job markets around the world to expand their occupational horizons (Murden et al., 2008).

Finally, these interventions might serve the students to facilitate building realistic

view of work, and value their full contribution as dynamic citizens in their own local job market.

The Need of Career Counseling Services in Lebanese Schools

A major conclusion of this study is that students need career guidance in order to make well informed decisions regarding their major. There is a need for integrating career counseling programs and developmentally appropriate interventions in Lebanese schools to deal with the needs of students in kindergarten through grade twelve. How should career counseling be provided? Career counseling is very much associated to personal counseling because it requires the same basic competencies in addition to a comprehensive knowledge of career development theories.

Necessary comprehensive developmental career guidance programs can be applied to elementary students, where the main career goal should be gaining career awareness (Zunker, 2002). How do the students achieve career awareness? First, the school counselor should help the students to identify the different kind of careers and their roles in the society as well as to recognize the vocational preparation requirements and the responsibilities of each. Second, the school counselor should facilitate the students' ability of self-expression, in order to develop a healthy self-esteem and students can eventually make their own preferences (McIntosh, 2000). Different strategies and activities can be implemented to enhance students' self-knowledge, such as, using open-ended sentences in group discussions, describing themselves by listing their interests and their skills (Zunker, 2002), and visiting community sites and local businesses. Third, students need to understand themselves by discovering their strengths and weakness to become actively involved in their career development and to make a relation with the world of work. It is very essential to explore the world of work, to observe what goes on around them, and

identify their favorite jobs because later on it will help students to make informed career decisions. Forth, helping elementary students to enhance their awareness about the different occupations and changing male/female roles. In her theory, Gottferdson (1996) confirms that these students recognize what is suitable for one's sex only; accordingly, the career counselor should guide the maturity of their thinking to correct their misperception about gender roles. Several activities can be applied to reinforce students' understanding of the role of the opposite gender in certain occupations, for example, females can list all the positive characteristics of a career that is usually dominated by males and discuss how they are capable of performing most jobs. Fifth, students at this age should be provided with positive role models, and the most significant role models for elementary students are often their own parents. Thus, the school counselor should involve students and parents in different guidance activities, for instance, categorizing the occupational patterns of the family members, inviting parents into the classroom to discuss about their career, and taking students to parents' work environment (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008).

Proper career planning and guidance with suitable interventions are also needed to be implemented, during the middle and high school years to help students make successful decisions regarding their college plans and future careers (Zunker, 2002). According to Erikson (1963), the middle school years are critical period of development because students are in search of their identity. During this stage, career exploration activities (Akos, 2004) and career goal clarity are two developmental concepts that are significant for high school career counseling programs, for the purpose of helping students become productive contributing members of the world community later on. Career exploration activities are important because first, they expose the students to a variety of careers and provide them with many opportunities; second, they help

them to make tentative plans and decisions. One of these activities is to observe a career of interest in their community and then discuss about the working conditions, the tools, the job requirements (Zunker, 2002) and the contribution of that job in the society. In order to accomplish this process, students in the middle school should reach to a greater depth of information about themselves. A lot of activities can be designed for this purpose, for example, the counselor should conduct a self-assessment activities (Blackhurst et al., 2003) to identify students' interests; abilities; values; attitude; skills (Turner et al., 2008); aptitudes (Herr, 2001); motivations (O'Shea, 2003); social and personal roles (Chen, 2003); past roles (Guichard, 2005); preferred environments; developmental needs; and personal realities.

According to Super (1990), during the high school years the choices of the students are narrowed but not settled. They need appropriate career guidance to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses, to explore the demands of their job market, and to develop working skills. The role of the counselor is to design different strategies that contribute in shaping students' self-knowledge, such as, recognizing the physical differences among them and valuing the cooperative efforts in the work environment (Zunker, 2002). During this stage students should determine the different college opportunities and the majors they desire to enroll in.

The need for career counseling in the schools is for more than just helping the students choose their major or their future career, but it is also to support the students to adapt to the changing environment and expanding their choices. For example, they should be aware of the influence of the rapid technological changes and the newly created careers that are invading the society. As a result, the schools should integrate academic and vocation education to increase students' career awareness and career maturity, as well as help them face the new technological world of work that require high level of working skills (Zunker, 2002). In a well designed career

guidance program, all the staff members should be involved in, including administrators, teachers and parents (Amatea et al., 2004) to serve all the students regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, cultural background, socioeconomic status, etc. (Hijazi et al., 2004).

The Responsibilities of the Career Counselor in Lebanon

Having established the fact that career counselor is needed in our Lebanese schools, what are the expected responsibilities of the counselor? Most importantly, the counselor's role should be a very dynamic that aims at helping students, starting from preschool years to grade twelve, to develop sufficient self-awareness and self-understanding to make smooth decisions. Decision making process begins with a heightened awareness and understanding of one's beliefs, work values, needs, ambitions, lifestyle, skills, abilities and interests. What are skills? Skills refer to what the students are good at. For example, they can identify the skills that they have developed from past experiences, such as, hobbies, past jobs, and school activities. What are abilities? Abilities are the talents or the tasks that the students are able to perform relatively well. What are interests? Interests are one's likes and dislikes. Consequently, accepting the combination of skills, abilities and interests show if students have a good match between what they are good at, what they do well, and what they enjoy. Moreover, understanding the relationship among these personal qualities will guide them to achieve future success and satisfaction. As a result, the career counselor should take into consideration, first, the subject areas that the students are mostly interested in (which subject areas do they do well in?), second, the skills and the talents that the students have (what do they did well and enjoyed in the past?), third, the strengths and weaknesses of the students (what have they done well and enjoyed in the past?), forth, the

dreams that the students have (what do they envision themselves doing?), fifth, the students' values and abilities (what type of work will they consider to be fulfilling?).

Another critical role that the career counselor plays in assisting students in the university major choosing process is to provide the students with effective exploration of career fields and job characteristics that can help the students develop realistic goals. The career counselor should encourage the students for a thorough investigation to understand the world of work. At the same time, the students should have the opportunity to explore the different duties that are involved in a career, (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008) and the careers that provide opportunities for advancement (Lapan & Kosciulek, 2003) and creativity, and allow them to utilize their skills.

The career guidance should be a part of the academic program to improve school involvement and its performance. Within this framework the responsibilities of the career counselor should be effective for elementary, middle and high school classes. Regardless of the particular approaches and the strategies that can be applied during each stage of development, there are general elements that the career counselor should be abided by. The career counselor should use career assessments to help students to know and understand themselves better (McMahon et al., 2003), conduct interviews to gather more detailed data (Palladino Schultheiss, 2005) and assist students in gathering information on the "self" (Guichard, 2003), plan effective workshops to assist students to reduce the influence of gender stereotype and ethnic discrimination (Perrone, 2001), organize effective career fairs to introduce wide diversity of careers from different cultures (Morrow-Taylor et al., 1999), arrange field trips to view workers in their real setting, keep up-to-date career-related computer programs to match students' personality type to career qualities (Savickas, 2003), such as, the DISCOVER system that is "designed to assist high school and college students in making career choices" (Zunker, 2002, p.

260), use tests to diagnose students' characteristics, for instance, Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS) which can be used as a guide to educational and career planning.

Career-related procedures differ for each level, as to elementary classes, the school counselor should keep career resources such as, computer programs that combines animation, photography, and music, or occupational dictionary that give students the opportunity for interactive participation. Also, many activities can be performed during this stage, for instance, students take turns acting out a worker's duties, while the rest of the class will guess what jobs are being acted out. In addition, have students identify resources for obtaining occupational information (library, counselor's office, newspapers, magazines, computer programs, etc.). Moreover, visiting local businesses and class visitors can expand and broaden the child's understanding and perspective of the world of work. Concerning the middle school students, they can observe or interview people in their community involved in different careers and afterwards they should be able to prepare projects about their observations. They should list the reasons why people work, and classify the important job satisfiers to them (good wages, job security, promotion, tactful discipline, sympathetic help with personal problems, etc.). Regarding high school students, the responsibilities of the career counselor continues to prepare them for a variety of life role through many activities, for example, have students write letters of reference for themselves to describe convenient skills and abilities that might be evident to others. Help students identify the personality type of Holland's career key test and learn the detailed information about each. The more information students possess about themselves, the easier it is to choose their university major and their future career.

In addition to all the above mentioned responsibilities, career counselors should

pay attention to the following factors while helping the students during their major or career choosing process. First, they should represent clearly the demands of the unpredictable economical structure of the job market. Second, they should provide support for the gender role awareness in schools for career development (Hansen, 2003), and understand the barriers that determine career choice goals (Perrone et al., 2001). Third, they should shed light on the relationship between parental involvement and university major choosing process. Forth, they should support the students when they face conflicts to assimilate within own cultural identity their career preferences.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that the demand for career counseling services in the schools is essential, and it should be a solid system integrated in the school's academic life. In addition, different theoretical approaches and intervention strategies should be implemented by the counselor to help students to take significant decisions related to their future major in the university and the occupational preferences. Career counseling should not be a singular process but rather continuum interventions. And the chief focus of the career counselor should be on helping all the students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and at different ages, with their career decisions. They should explore and evaluate the students' education, training, interests, skills, and personality traits, in order to enhance the career maturity of the students. Career counseling should be tailored also to take into consideration the need of the job market, so that students can encompass effective social benefits. Moreover, the fact that society sometimes imposes a different role and set of tasks on women, then the career counselor should focus on gender to incorporate it in the guidance interventions. Finally, the career counselor

should help parents also, to understand how to prevent their children from unwisely choosing a major based on imposed factors, such as; family business or family socioeconomic status.

Future Recommendations

More studies are needed to collect data about the different factors that influence high school students while choosing their university major. First, I recommend interviews with teachers, parents and counselors, because these multiple sources of information will add more depth to our understanding of career counseling in Lebanon. Second, this study is conducted with a small sample. If more students from private and governmental universities as well as at different age levels are included, more insightful influences can be reached. Third, further inquiry is needed to explore the complexities of Lebanese students' career developmental process. For instance, a future research should take into consideration the differences by ethnicity within the group. Because differences in racial or ethnic identity are perceived an important implication for career development, especially that the Lebanese population is composed of a variety of ethnic subgroups, it would be important to investigate the differences between these groups and how these differences might play a role in the university major choosing process.

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Appendix A

Please fill in the following demographic information.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your age?

- ☐ Less than 21
- ☐ 21 to 29
- ☐ 30 to 39
- ☐ 40 to 49
- ☐ 50 or older

What is the university that you are enrolled in currently? -----

What is your major: -----

What is your current academic status?

- ☐ Freshman
- ☐ Sophomore
- ☐ Junior
- ☐ Senior

Where did you complete your high school? (Name of the school)-----

What level of education did your father attain?

- ☐ Up to elementary classes
- ☐ Up to intermediate level
- ☐ Up to High School
- ☐ College graduate
- ☐ Post-graduate studies

If your father is a college graduate, what was his major? -----

What level of education did your mother attain?

- ☐ Up to elementary classes
- ☐ Up to intermediate level
- ☐ Up to High School
- ☐ College graduate
- ☐ Post-graduate studies

If your mother is a college graduate, what was her major? -----

In a few sentences answer the following questions.

If you need more space to answer the question, please write on the back of the pages. Make sure to include the number of the question.

1. Explain to what extent your friends/peers/classmates have influenced your choice of major in the university?

2. Explain to what extent your ethnic background has influenced your choice of major in the university?

3. Explain to what extent your religious believes have influenced your choice of major in the university?

4. Explain to what extent “certain significant others” (not your parents) have influenced your choice of major in the university?

5. Do you think that your choice of university major and your future career support your cultural values? Why?

6. Did your parents agree with your choice of major in the university? Why?

7. If your family owns a business, what effect did it have on your choice of major in the university?

8. How do you think your family's financial status influenced your choice of major in the university?

9. What majors were preferred by your parents?

10. What would be your response if your parents perceived your current major as “male” or “female” major?

11. What kind of job will you choose after graduating? (With fix or variable salary/permanent, temporary, contractual or non profit job, etc.....)

12. What financial expectations do you have for yourself during your career journey?

13. Did you have financial difficulties during the process of choosing your major in the university? If yes, how do you think that affected your decision?

14. To what extend is your major needed in the job market of your country of origin?

15. Do you think that it is easy to find a new job related to your major in your local job market?

Why? Why not?

16. In what way do you think that the job opportunities related to your major in your local market will be affected by the international economical recession?

17. In which job market are you planning to search for a job? Why?

18. How did you get help to find a major that fits you best? (Career tests/internet research/ teachers' help/other...)

19. If you received career counseling services, how effectively were these services?

20. At which grade in the school did you decide to enroll in your current major in the university?

21. How often did your school take you on school trips to explore different careers?

22. How many options did your school counselor discuss with you before applying to college?

23. What were your criteria in choosing your current major?

24. In which stage in school did you receive career counseling services?

25. Were you knowledgeable about the major of your choice when you completed high school?

Explain.

26. In your opinion, how can students be helped to find the major that suits them best?

27. Is your current major in the university based on your school grades in that particular subject?

If yes, explain.

28. In your opinion, why is your major suitable for you as male/female?

29. Does the society that you live in perceive your choice of a major as “male”/”female” major?
Why?

30. Can you manage working in a job in the future where the majority of the employees are from the opposite gender? If yes, what personal characteristics do you have in order to handle that particular job?

31. Approximately, what percentage of males/females is enrolled in your major in the university?

32. How helpful were the career counseling services in your school (if any) regarding the challenges to working in cross-gender occupations?

33. List all the occupations (that you are aware of) that you can carry out in your field after graduation?

34. Did you choose a university major that can prepare you for a variety of careers? Or you have already chosen a career first and then decided on the possible majors to enroll in?

35. What personal qualities do you possess that will help you in your future job? (skills/abilities)

36. How did your personality traits influence your major choosing process? (interests/values)

37. Did you change your major after your first choice? If yes, why did you change your major?

38. What were the obstacles that you faced to enroll in your current major in the university?

39. What do you like the most in your major?

40. Do you consider yourself happy or content in the choice of your major in the university?

Explain why?

41. Did you face any academic problems in your university major during the first year? If yes, what did you do or could have done to overcome/avoid these difficulties?

42. What are your plans after graduation? (Working in teams or individually/just to have a university degree/working in my own business)
