

Sense of self-worth and “Extra feminist assistance” Advancing and strengthening occupational aspirations among girls from stigmatized communities

SIGAL OPPENHAIM-SHACHAR

Abstract

There are a multitude of intervention programs and procedures in the field of occupational guidance for youth. However, closer examination reveals that some of these programs miss their mark and, unintentionally, actually reinforce devaluation among this population, particularly among girls. This missed opportunity stems primarily from the lack of an appropriate conceptualisation of the needs of teenage girls within the design, development and implementation of these employment programs. The purpose of this study was to conceptualise ‘extra feminist assistance’ as is needed for girls from stigmatised communities, which would allow them to advance themselves in the path of achieving financial independence. This article clarifies the characteristics of ‘extra feminist assistance’ through the presentation of three negotiation reactions by girls who participated in the *Reshatot* workshop. The workshop is intended to strengthen the development of employment aspirations. The findings presented here indicate that the ‘extra feminist assistance’ is generated when the intervention processes contain the following dimensions: sense of self-worth; knowledge and relationships that allow the girls to both subvert and oppose the stigma and labels placed on them; the understanding that their needs are separate; and strengthening their sense of entitlement.

Introduction

“I have no money in my pocket for all the types of daily things... I need work. But it is hard for me to go ask, I have no strength, I want the work to come to me, I went to

ask about waitressing but they told me 'leave your number etc. etc. and we will call' ... So I give up, I have no strength to continue searching for work... I thought you were here to help me... because it sucks when they tell you no" (Avivit¹, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11).

These words reflect the frustration experienced by this girl, who joined the *Reshatot* workshop but felt that despite her participation in it, she was still experiencing rejection from employers. These remarks indicate that the rejection reinforces her sense of an inability to overcome the barriers, barriers that she identifies as a part of her personality.

The gap between the intentions of the intervention program (improving self efficacy, for example) and the way in which girls experience the assistance is a topic that occupies the research field (Fairbrother, 2008). Research examines this gap with the goal of reducing not just the content of the intervention but also the way in which they are offered to, and primarily experienced by, the participants. This gap was the motivating factor for this current action research study (Oppenheim-Shachar, 2012), which accompanied 34 girls who participated in the *Reshatot* program, and who were interviewed afterwards as part of the program evaluation process. The purpose of this study was to investigate the conditions that can produce accurate and optimal dialogue between girls and the content of the intervention. The research findings are deciphered as three distinct forms of negotiation that the girls conducted with the workshop content. These findings help establish a conceptualisation which can provide tools to optimise the process of intervention programs in the future.

Reshatot ('Networks' in Hebrew) is a program comprising a series of 22 workshops developed in partnership with Ashalim, a program of the JOINT, in 2008. The goal of *Reshatot* is to encourage occupational efficacy among girls and boys from ethnic minority groups² from stigmatised neighbourhoods. Occupational efficacy is defined by the *Reshatot* program as gaining the skills which will promote long-term planning capacity and developing perspectives about sources of support, as well as the knowledge resources which can expand understanding of the complexity of the barriers (Benjamin, Aroch, Pinchasi, & Weintraub, 2008). In order to deal with these complex barriers, rather than encouraging youth from stigmatised communities to develop aspirations and the expression of a deep purpose (Hill et al., 2003), youth require mediated dialogue regarding realistic possibilities and the perception of difficulties (Diemer, 2009)

The need for a paradigm shift was strengthened by feminist scholars whose claim that the dominant discourse in the field of occupational guidance tends to ignore girls and young women (Gonick, 2006), and as such weakens and distances them from developing worthy realistic and accessible occupational aspirations (Harris, 2004). This discourse relies on the common assumption that in the 'post-feminist'

era, girls have the power to become whatever they choose (McRobbie, 2007). From this perspective, girls, such as Avivit, the 17 year old girl whose words were quoted above, are required to believe in and defend their strength “to choose” an employment future, without the knowledge or awareness of the structural barriers that constrain their choices (McLeod & Yates, 2006) and which leave them without power.

Interpreting difficulties and lack of success solely as a lack of personal ability grows from a public climate that expects and demands personal responsibility. This demand contributes to the alienation of those who face difficulty in turning themselves around and becoming productive citizens. Learning from past experiences Reshatot sought to avoid weakening the participants, and instead provide them with the effective tools of ‘extra assistance’. ‘Extra assistance’ refers to strengthening their skills by allowing them to identify existing strategies in their daily conduct (McLeod & Yates, 2006), and encouraging the search for additional resources which can help them envision the future (Bettie, 2003). Additionally, the workshop sought to dismantle self-stigma and remove the cumulative sense of failure and devaluation (Dimmer, 2009).

In this article, I argue that although the intention of *Reshatot* is to operate differently than other programs, it did not succeed in becoming a program with effective and equal ‘extra assistance’ for all of the participants. The particularly painful quote at the beginning of the paper represents how even after prolonged support from the workshops, girls such as Avivit may remain weakened, frustrated and powerless, sometimes even more than they were prior to participation in the program.

This study raises the possibility that there are factors, aside from the content of the workshop, which produces distinct dialogues amongst the girls, and influences the effectiveness of the workshop for them. These factors can reduce the lack of awareness which is known to hinder the achievement of goals of the intervention process, and enables the ‘extra assistance’ to be more effective.

Theoretical background -

‘Effective assistance’

This article seeks to offer a way of establishing realistic occupational aspirations amongst girls from stigmatised communities. The importance of this process for them is increasing because of the reduction and privatisation of public services, transferring responsibility for achieving economic independence to the girls themselves whilst providing too little support (Cohen & Yurovitch, 2009). The situation leads to frustration among girls from stigmatised communities lacking knowledge and skills, resources and connections (Harris, 2004). Therefore, these girls in particular need ‘extra assistance’ which will, as Marnina Gonick (2006) defined it, allow them to cope

with the continuous stigma which reduces their sense of competence for developing realistic and accessible occupational aspirations.

Such ‘extra assistance’ can enable girls to establish occupational aspirations by providing tools for identifying the structural barriers and processes (McLeod & Yates, 2006) that minimise their opportunities. The premise is that critical socio-political knowledge has strong potential (Dimmer, 2009) and may allow them to cope better with tasks. This assistance is primarily geared to enable girls to invent new ways to maximise their economic potential. The goal of the available assistance is to enable them to identify the relevant resources they lack, and make them accessible to and relevant for them. The absence of these resources is profound among girls growing up with little material, social, and cultural capital (Harris, 2004). The assistance is designed to help them to escape from the paths paved for them by society (Damaske, 2011) and lying in wait for them (Hebson, 2009).

The accumulated knowledge in the field of support programs for girls (McLeod & Yates, 2006) shows that for the sake of making ‘extra assistance’ accessible, the programs need to take into consideration the intersection of marginal social locations such as gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, etc. This multifaceted system (Mutzafi Heller, 2013) may produce conflicting claims or demands among the girls in relation to the formulation of their economic and occupational identities. To cope with these conflicting demands, it is important to examine the category of ‘girls from stigmatised communities’ as fluid, made up of girls with diverse identities (Bettie, 2003). This way, any intervention program – including *Reshatot* – can incorporate differentiated responses for the complex themes and content around them.

Activities aim to strengthen individual action to make choices. This personal empowerment (Bettie, 2003) is founded on the assumption that ‘promoting yourself’ is based upon one’s own determination. But with no distinction made regarding the differences between the girls, it is the cause of persistent and ongoing distrust.

This distrust reinforces social exclusion and stigmatisation, and results in the girls missing out on the assistance. Therefore, in order to support them, it is particularly important to understand and illuminate the connection between every girl’s social location and her perception of her occupational future. Differential relationships and treatment are likely to help the girls to develop distinct coping mechanisms, which can allow them to bridge the gap stemming from conflicting demands related to the occupational identity they need to develop.

Occupational aspirations and self-efficacy in the field of intervention programs and embodied in *Reshatot*

Occupational efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to implement goals in relation to investigating and choosing a career (Betz & Hackett, 1989; 2006). Occupational efficacy has three dimensions: 1. Choosing options for an education or profession, 2. Career exploration, and 3. Making essential behavioural decisions for the 'right choice' (Betz & Hackett, 1989).

Considering the suitability of these dimensions for girls facing numerous barriers raises an important issue. Using the standards of the 'right choice' in the framework of assistance interventions, measures and reinforces prior failure: the lack of support from home and the environment in selecting a track, the lack of occupational successes needed to investigate career options, and the low 'occupational image' which infringes on decision making ability. All these add up to an experience in which the picture of the future presented is not, in their eyes, desirable (Pery & Vance, 2010).

The labour market, within the context of privatisation and social alienation, tends to separate the girls' 'avoidance' as an expression of non-obligatory and partial exploration processes (Gonick, 2006). This interpretation leads intervention programs to focus on the internal barriers the girls face (McCash, 2006), in an attempt to respond to the lack of skills and practice in the labor market. Such programs can be a trap, particularly when they coincide with the approach known as 'work first' (Tamir & Noiman, 2007). This approach, intended to encourage difficult populations to integrate into the labour market and to promote immediate placement without accompaniment or support, may obstruct the potential to gain quality employment and earn a reasonable living.

The exploration of career options is central for developing occupational efficacy, and develops the type of dialogue that a girl conducts with her surroundings. This dialogue is built upon the images of an occupational identity that the girl experiences as accessible for her (Evans, 2006). When trying to clarify possible ways of encouraging girls through an approach that supports exploration instead of 'avoidance behaviours,' (Betz & Hackett, 2006), it becomes clear that a program that does not consider or address all of the girl's abilities and circumstances will be experienced as alienating, and will contribute to low self-confidence and trust. Therefore, the content of a program that encourages immediate placement cannot clarify the power of the social context; nor can it explain the influence it has on the contradictory images designed in the employment arena. Such a program will find it difficult to establish an optimal process for the girls, to motivate an effective and reflective search for information, and to examine and assess skills.

When a girl in a stigmatising framework (i.e. school) develops 'avoidance behaviour,' it is necessary to provide her with support infused with critical

socio-political knowledge sufficient to bridge the gap between her feelings of inferiority and her faith in her abilities and resources (Pery & Vance, 2010). In the absence of mediation, the girl is likely to be drawn after a false image of herself as one who ‘can do’, one who believes that it is in her power do whatever she wants (Gonick, 2006). The consequence is that she then faces the possible and logical experience of failure which continues and expands the cycle of self-blame and shame (McLeod & Yates, 2006). For such a girl to be able to hold a quality employment position, she needs continuous training in skills of occupational efficacy, and specifically in establishing accessible and realistic occupational aspirations. This training can influence the girls’ faith in her ability to cope with complex barriers (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2004), and help her set for herself a desired future orientation (Pery & Vance, 2010).

Reshatot is a program that took upon itself the task of addressing the fundamental deficiencies that had been mapped in the field of programs, and to improve occupational efficacy focusing on three areas: 1. Strengthening awareness and understanding of the activities of stigmatising structures – such as the education and welfare systems and dominant discourse in the media; 2. Establishing accessible occupational aspirations that feed the desired future orientation and stimulate the action necessary to achieve it; 3. Marking a wide and long term employment horizon through training and processes aimed at improving opportunities and skills and planning (Benjamin, Aroch, & Weintraub, 2008). This mission was created with the belief that these three dimensions can assist girls in coping with all of the elements blocking their path to self-actualisation, such as shame, fear, worry, stigma, and the internalisation of labels (McLeod & Yates, 2006).

The focus on the three objectives described above is based on the assumption that dialogue produces an educational process that is imbued with knowledge about the ways in which the social structure operates. As such, it has the capacity to replace the therapeutic process that is likely to perpetuate institutional stigmatising activities. The attempt to allow girls to recognise that the lack of resources is neither personal, related to their personalities, nor fixed, has become an inseparable part of program activities that simultaneously encouraged training in the use of hierarchical relationships in the employment world as a way of reducing exclusionary activities (Warr, 2005). The understanding of deficits – a temporary result of circumstances – along with the understanding that the source of the lack of resources can promote the motivation to learn and practice different skills, and can strengthen the girl’s faith in her ability to acquire the resources that she lacks at this point and in the future (Betz & Hackett, 1986).

This paper seeks to examine the terms in which a program based on socio-political knowledge (Diemer, 2009), can help girls cope with the complex stigma that they experience at home, as they attempt to learn networking skills in school and the community.

Research findings show that effective critical socio-political dialogue for girls helps them build belief in their abilities and resources to produce a desired occupational image, and build an accessible occupational future orientation (Pery & Vance, 2010). Hence the intervention process has to take into account the way in which family relationships shape girls' self-worth, and can affect her level of faith in her abilities and her future. The intervention must provide tools which will enable her to cope with the complex labelling.

Methodology

This article is based on action research that accompanied the *Reshatot* program. The study comprises of interviews with 34 girls, participants in 4 different workshops, and of field observations written whilst supervising three workshops. These workshops took place out between 2008 and 2009 in three locations: A support centre for girls in southern Israel; a school for 'Second Chances' in a city in central Israel; and a therapeutic centre for girls in a city in the central Israel. About 10 of the girls who passed through the workshops in the community centre in a small northern town with other facilitators were interviewed after the conclusion of the workshop. All of the girls were aged between 16 and 18 at the time of the workshops; most were second generation immigrants from Ethiopia, and some were third generation immigrants from Arab countries. Almost all of them lived (and presumably still live) in conditions of economic survival, in families that are registered with social services.

Adhering as much as possible to the actual experiences of the girls that were studied (Bettie, 2003) is done with the intention of helping shedding light on the conditions necessary for these girls to experience the workshop as a space that allows for the acquisition of resources. The need to understand the experiences of the girls as a starting point for constructivist evaluation research, one which accompanies intervention activities, defined the character of the methodology. I used a pedagogical method and 'critical action research' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002), which focuses on the nature of a practice in order to improve it and the situation in which it occurs. The pedagogical method derived from this study allows the 'practitioners' to move beyond the stage of 'knowledge consumers' and to become 'knowledge producers,' in order to improve the work, weigh causes and solutions, and to examine the activities in order to improve their efficiency (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). This approach is based primarily on the understanding that this type of research is dependent primarily on

interactions between the researcher and research subjects, and on the materials that arise in the field (Brydon-Miller & Greenwood, 2006). This awareness – and therefore the flexibility in the research design – should promote feminist values of social action intended to improve lives.

The feminist approach seeks to establish long term and multidimensional relationships with the participants, and to establish a relationship of trust without a sense of distance and suspicion (Reinhartz, 1992). These close relationships enable full and rich description of the girl’s complex, diverse and distinctive experiences. The purpose of this is to try to ensure that their voices and needs will not be included under a uniform conceptual category.

Findings – The girls’ sense of entitlement to define desired and accessible occupational aspirations

The girls conducted three types of negotiation responses, with the content of occupational efficacy and the three main components of *Reshatot* (planning skills, connections and support, and developing a positive employment perspective). These negotiation responses may be classed as ‘repulsion negotiation’, ‘cautious negotiation’, and ‘reluctant acceptance’; this paper focuses on the participants’ three responses to the invitation to develop occupational aspirations. All negotiation strategies outlined below reveal a process made up of 4 dimensions: a) the way in which the girl experiences her place and rights in the home; b) the feelings that accompany her in her conduct; c) the identity from which she derives her worth; d) the way in which the workshop misses or strengthens her needs.

First Process: Managing repulsion with the task of setting occupational aspirations

“... I’ll tell you that by my mother and grandmother, the belief is that only girls need to clean and cook, and boys don’t. There is nothing to do, we do this better than them, and so this is... our job.”

In another place:

Q: Then why does your brother go to these classes and you don’t?

A: Because my brother had free time and I do not.

(Tal, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11).

This girl accepts the gender division of roles that require her to take care of the household needs (Joseph, 1993). This demand placed upon her to help in the home takes away her free time, but also teaches her to believe that her first and primary task is performing housework to address the needs of the home. This process usually leaves girls with a partial sense of entitlement to take care of other needs, as these take

up the limited resources of family struggling with poverty.

Q: So if you like to dance, why didn't you continue?

A: I watch my little sister and brother because my mother is at work. So I couldn't... (-) I will tell you though... I also stopped loving it so much...

(Liora, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, grade 12).

The process of reducing the sense of entitlement is accompanied by cessation. This can be seen with the girl who gave up once on dancing itself and once on her love for dance, because there were not enough resources (in terms of time and money) at her disposal. It is possible that a girl operating with this sense of lack and restriction on activities in the home learns from her environment that she must reduce her needs. In the absence of appropriate mediation, she is likely to experience school as an arena that is equally irrelevant for her.

"Look, I have no head for school... all day I would sit outside – boys, cigarettes, jokes... I couldn't deal with the tests and the pressure, and the "dishes"... I evaded all day. Then the teacher told me [points with her hand] 'bye bye'"

(Smadar, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11).

It is evident that with girls who repelled the content of the workshop, the messages disseminated were not strong enough to weaken the internalisation of the voices that stigmatise, or to undermine the process in which the label becomes part of their description of their personalities (Black, 2004). If this girl had believed in her power and in the possibility of being assisted, she could have learned that the statement "I have no head for school" could be a temporary situation dependent on circumstances, and not something fixed and personal, as can be seen in the case of this girl:

[Pointing with fingers] "I worked in a store, I worked in Rami Levi [a supermarket] as a cashier, I worked washing hair, even at Intel, my brother arranged a cleaning job for me, but I didn't like it, my hair is being pulled all the time... I don't want to be there... there's no life there, dead [cleaning when the workers are not on the floor], I was a waitress, what did I not do... not diligent. Keren [the social worker] told me that they will never accept me into national service because I am not serious."

And elsewhere:

"I already told you, I don't have a head for studying; I... can't sit still..."

(Meira, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, 18 years old, not part of the normative education system)

These girls who internalise messages such as 'not diligent' and 'not serious' believe them, and learn to give up for themselves and on themselves. The label – and the sense

of worthlessness that accompanies it – radiates also to areas in which they might be able to discover ability, instead making the process of learning and persistence harder.

Many draw their value and identity from their role as the traditional daughter who attends to the needs of the home and family, and from executing practices of filling the traditional gender roles (Dodson & Dickert, 2004).

“What can I do well...? I...I... I’m good at mopping and watching my sister at home... oh. I also make really great rice. Really...”

(Shira, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, 18 years old, not part of the normative education system)

“... We are all here, great caregivers – little mothers, all week, except for Thursday evening. Thursday... no tests, no studies, and no activities. Nothing... only cleaning and cooking...”

(Liora, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 12)

From their continuous life experience of a lack of success in serving and pleasing the system, most of the girls cannot respond to the workshop, probably because they identified it as another stigmatising system, similar to the education system.

“I don’t know, I am not good at these kind of things... to answer questions and all that” [she was asked to comment on the activities based on her perspective]

(Fanny, second generation immigrant from Caucasus, workshop diary, Grade 11)

The workshop was perceived by these girls as another weakening structure that pushed messages that were not relevant for them. They were asked to develop an identity that contradicted their existing identity, one which gives them a sense of value and meaning - the daughter who attends to the needs of her family, for example. It seems that even within their weakened situations, the workshop demanded power and resources that they were yet unable to marshal. Thus, it merely reinforced their lack of faith in their abilities even more. From this experience, the possibility of imagining occupational aspirations is either silenced or experienced as impossible. As mentioned by two girls in one of the Southern town meetings:

“In what do you think we can work? Even we don’t know how to do anything important. And even here... we have no options.... Everything is blocked here.”

(Workshop diary in a small town in Southern Israel, grade 11, 7th meeting)

It can be assumed that the word “here” does not only represent the peripheral geographic location, but is rather an overall metaphor representing the sense of helplessness and lack that they experience. These feelings stem from the fact that they lack important resources and skills. Repelling the content of the workshop leaves ‘everything blocked’ intact,

as an abstract and vague concept that can't be broken down into specific and defined barriers. This general statement encourages an undesirable future orientation, one which paralyses the girls and denies them the opportunity to discuss a desired, realistic, and accessible future.

Another option, that of repelling the discussion about establishing occupational aspirations, is indicated through the prominent desire to gain respectability.

A: A good job...? I don't want work that humiliates you... I want a respectable job.

Q: What does 'respectable' mean?

A: [Work that won't] embarrass you... not just a good salary. You know... to be treated in such a way.

(Vicky, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, grade 11)

Given their low self-esteem, these girls don't believe that advancing their capabilities is possible, and thus try to bridge the gap between their position and the longing they experience by doubting its feasibility. Their aspirations remains general and vague and cannot be converted into employment. It seems that the workshop process failed to help, because the sense of entitlement was too low to even present separate needs.

To summarise: The process of repulsion by the girls, who were raised in homes in which they had limited resources, demonstrates how some are required to reduce their sense of entitlement to express and actualise needs separate from those of the family. Simultaneously, the process shows the difficulties they face in asking for support through the school system and in finding the time and resources to devote to learning. As a result, they blame themselves for their failure, and are ashamed of their professional, academic, and employment incapability. These girls cast doubts on their own abilities and resources, and in their desire to establish a sense of meaning and self-worth for themselves, hold on to and strengthen their traditional gender roles (Dodson & Dickert, 2004). This is a process which tends to reduce the possibility of getting support and training for developing more diverse capabilities even more.

The workshop, which did not take into account the extent of their entitlement, demanded ongoing effort and coping strength from them, which only caused them to further reinforce their sense of incapability. It also weakened their ability to set for themselves a realistic, desirable and accessible future orientation.

Second Process: Managing 'cautious negotiation' with the task of defining occupational aspiration

Girls that conducted cautious negotiation described how, in a system of limited resources, family members try to identify and respond to their individual needs.

“... Look, for me, my parents are both unemployed and there is no money in the house, only from my oldest brother who helps a bit sometimes. [Silence] but when it comes to school, my father would ‘give his last breath’ and give me the money, even... for the annual trip.”
(Ravit, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 12)

“... They [six brothers] are all in one room, and I am in the second room – I am a girl... I need privacy.”
(Ruchama, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 11)

These two cases transmit the message that school requirements or a separate room for a girl are important. They can signal to the girl as well that there will be both a response and support for other needs as well. This response can allow her to experience and develop a partial sense of entitlement. The process of expending partial eligibility in the home, in turn, can allow the girls to create a parallel dialogue between the stigmatising voices and the preliminary voices of a positive image, as they come to consider the future feasibility of occupational aspirations.

A: I am at a crossroads. On the one hand, my dream is to enlist in the army, God knows what I will do there, and after I am released, to go study acting. However, life has taught me other things, I discovered interesting things. For example, I am very interested in studying criminology. And they told me that I can carry out my national service with young people, and it sounds cool... like that’s it. To cut a long story short, so to speak, I heard from someone who is doing a doctorate and she works in Hebrew University, a professor there who did her internship in a prison in Ramle. This really interests me, things like that. So they told me that I can do my army service with youth. My ambitions are great, even bordering audacious. Get in proportion.

Q: Why do you think it’s audacious?

A: That I can act and also work in criminology?

(Vered, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 11)

In this case, one can see considerable strengthening in relation to future thinking, but the girl herself is casting doubt on its feasibility in relation to her living conditions and resources. Despite the fact that she is developing a future image based on academic studies, and sees a possible role model before her, she still fears that her resources are not enough in relation to the aspirations identified.

Cautious negotiation, managed by girls together with developing occupational aspirations, is primarily related to their faith in their abilities to learn and continue education, which will contribute towards securing a good job in the future:

Q: What does a 'good job' mean to you?

A: Doctor, judge, what I told you, a lawyer, psychologist.

Q: Why are those considered good jobs?

A: Because... I don't know, a good job, a good salary, you know a lot of knowledge, and you are an educated woman.

(Vicky, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 12)

It is recognised that girls developing occupational aspirations by managing cautious negotiation seek ways to expand their ability to do so without unraveling their sense of belonging and framework. Therefore, they believe that if they remain in school, they will be able to develop occupational aspirations for themselves, which will in turn promote a 'good job' for an 'educated woman.'

"... I don't know if this counts, but last year I didn't really study, and I didn't pass matriculation exams in 'children' [child psychology]. The teacher came to me a little while ago and asked me if I want to make it up. I debated, to admit the truth! But I decided that I will try because she turned to me and told me that it's worth it and that I can... So I am learning a little...trying to make an effort... [Smiles], for the future."

(Rivka, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 11).

The 'future' is perceived as available and possible, and is tied to the need to commit and work hard. The belief that the school track and its expectations can help advance 'self-employment' and is appropriate and desirable is often encouraged in the home, and prompts them to cooperate and invest in their studies in order to continue on to academia.

Q: What is your aspiration in the field of employment?

A: I think a lawyer... that's what I think... really good job, the best job I could ask for.

Q: What do you need to do for it?

A: To study law, I know that it's a hard road... a lot of investment, to be diligent

(Mira, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 12)

These girls derive their value from their identities as 'good students,' from performing the practices of academic excellence. This is because they detect a relationship between effort, persistence, and determination in learning and suitable occupational aspirations. However, since the interaction of gender, race, and status influences the level of accessible support for the girls, it may also limit the possibility of translating the aspiration into a possible implementable path (Damaske, 2011). Therefore, alongside the development of a positive image for future employment, it is important to promote awareness of the barriers that they

may encounter along their way in the future because of the gap between academic success and occupational success, specifically among girls from stigmatised communities (Gonick, 2006). Persistence, determination and success in education is not necessarily sufficient (Harris, 2004).

The workshop's attempt to challenge the direct connection between occupational aspiration and academic studies, and to encourage awareness to expend their occupational aspirations along social skills and outside the academic track was less successful. The workshop content attempt to direct the girls to gain experience in a broad range of jobs on their way to settling into a long term professional career, using the principal called 'job shopping' (Yates, 2005). However, it is possible that for the girls who are conducting cautious negotiation, developing multiple paths is experienced as an option that is not safe enough, and therefore, less worthy.

A: If you are asking what I want to do, it is to learn psychological consulting, and to tell people what their suitable job options are... but it is very hard to get in! If you ask me what I will be in the end... ask me....

Q: So what will you work in in the end?

A: [laughs out loud] for sure a kindergarten teacher

(Lital, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11)

Although this girl wanted to work as a psychological consultant, she scoffs at this desire and raises doubts about its feasibility. The undoubted possibility that she will end up as a kindergarten teacher – and will continue the course of early childhood education in which she is already walking – is tied to the need to focus on a path that is practicable, realistic, and especially 'safe' for her. Relating to the work of the kindergarten teacher as an intermediate step on the path to a more desirable position is not in her mind at this point.

Girls that conduct 'cautious negotiation' with the content of the workshop have difficulty at this point believing the invitation to explore employment opportunities that are exempt from growing in the academic space or in other spaces that are less familiar and responsive to them. Based on a fragile sense of entitlement, they are afraid to unravel connection and belonging, and thus they validate an identity that relies primarily on academic competence when they settle in the existing system and focus on the planned learning path. In the absence of the skills necessary to acquire resources and relationships, if they remain on this path they may develop vulnerability. This is primarily because the ability to cope with the reality of the world that the workshop describes still remains outside their conceptual framework.

Negotiations, with the possibility to think about additional employment

possibilities, can be interpreted by some as an attempt to sever them from their world, their connections, and the safe space that they are familiar with through interaction on a daily basis. Therefore, it is recognised that they find it difficult to accede to critical-political knowledge which can demonstrate to them how their choices are gendered and are, at least partially, is more of an expression of the social structure process, and less of a personal choice (Hebson, 2009).

Third Process: Conducting ‘reluctant acceptance’ with the task of defining occupational aspirations

Girls that conduct ‘reluctant acceptance’ experience themselves as capable, especially since they live with the sense of support and ongoing encouragement, and have needs and desires separate from the needs of the home and family:

Q: What particularly significant connection can you point out?

A: My mother, she gives me everything I need, she does everything so that I will succeed, works hard, ‘gives her very breath’, so that we can have everything.
(Fanta, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, 18 years old, not part of the normative education system)

Q: Where do you work?

A: I don’t, I just learned... I had no time to combine work and school, so in the meantime I am focusing only on my studies...
(Danit, second generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11)

From the findings raised by the girls who conduct ‘reluctant acceptance,’ one can see that they live generally in families who see them as subjects with individual potential, separate from the others, who are capable of sustaining an independent life in the future. These family experiences of reciprocity allow the girls to develop an identity, one that is entitled to experience, present needs, and to search for ways to respond to them (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller & Surrey, 1999). From within their possibility to perceive themselves as connected to positive abilities, their images of themselves allows them to target occupational aspirations which will satisfy their broad spectrum of needs, more than those of the other girls.

A: Because I want to complete my matriculation... I want... I have aspirations for some profession...

Q: To what?

A: Social work. This is a field that really really... I don’t know... captivates me... firstly, all work with people, conversations, talking, everything,

everything, and it does me good, it gives me strength to help. Just like they helped me, I will help others.

(Shaviyah, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, 18 years old, not part of the normative education system)

Similarly to girls who conduct ‘cautious negotiation’, girls who conduct ‘reluctant acceptance’ learn from their close environment or connect to occupations that are familiar to them within their immediate environment. The models they meet on the way are mostly women who work in the fields of welfare and education; these women become significant figures for them since they are tied to experiences that are supportive, intense and powerful (Evance, 2006). Due to the proximity of these models, you can see how the re-enactment amongst the girls is a type of social circle, in which they create a professional identity aligned with professions in the ‘women’s niche’ (i.e. education, welfare, and nursing) (Damaske, 2011). These are professions that do not usually ensure a high income or social prestige.

A: ... social work is my dream from when I was born, because for me it is natural, this aspect of helping people, and I am also interested in people’s stories, I love to hear, it interests me, A lawyer, you know..., this is also interesting.

Q: If I would give you money for a scholarship to go study, what would you choose first? (Lawyer or social worker)

A: Social work... that is more interesting, the salary doesn’t matter to me.
(Almansh, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 11)

The workshop’s attempt to increase the range of choices for the girls and to offer possibilities for additional routes turned out to be less effective for some of them. This was mainly due to the dominant process of identification with the role to help someone. They often set the aspiration connected them to the needs and relationships that already exist in their worlds.

However, for the other groups of girls who participated in the workshop, it is important to examine the connection between the reality of their world and their desired future categories. This is significant in reading the map of their lives in a critical way, and the real path that seems possible and accessible in the present, in order to connect it to occupational aspiration.

“...I need to learn entrepreneurship because I want to change many things... I want to learn business administration... if you give me a scholarship that is what I will learn.”

(Gila, second generation immigrant from Ethiopia, Grade 11)

The expression 'I want to change many things' indicates a commitment to activism and mobilisation for change for both the speaker and her community; critical socio-political motivation may motivate action (Diemer, 2009)

"Today I am taking pictures in clubs, stills And everyone tells me that I've got it. I did a course of 12 photography classes, and I have a degree that I finished, and that's it. I made a film and I love it and want to continue... this is what I love most. This or music – to be a DJ. But in order to be a DJ you need a lot of money I need to gradually develop from a young age. This is something that will not help me in life for a long time. Photography will. Because for example, religious girls want a female photographer instead of a male photographer at their wedding, and there are not a lot of women who photograph weddings. I go and take photos in a night club, and upload the videos to a website, there you can see the pictures of who was there and who wasn't, how people look good, satisfied, enjoying themselves, having a good time, and how the place is beautiful ... it's like an advertisement."

(Limor, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 12)

Girls who conduct 'reluctant acceptance' already experience positivity and know that they can do many interesting things. They collect information and observe reality, the needs of others, the potential market, the conditions that shape their capabilities, and make informed decisions regarding the future. From the words of girls who negotiate 'reluctant acceptance,' you can see reflected a realistic and clear gaze, one which can mediate between their present living conditions and their desires in order that they will be able to advance towards optimal living conditions in the future.

A: I want to learn childhood education, I learn it here in psychology and I want to reinforce it because it interests me, its fun for me... there is a certain project that I want to do.

Q: What project?

A: Nothing, I want to speak, to do things like that, to teach women to raise their children

Q: Every parent, every woman, who does a childbirth preparation course will have to do a child raising preparation course. At least for the first child, a course, not a long course like I am learning now. A course of 10 classes.

(Danit, third generation immigrant from an Arab country, Grade 11)

These girls see the education system as one that offers them tools. They choose to cooperate with the path proposed to them, with the awareness that the knowledge they acquire in school can help secure a paying job, and eventually help realise their higher occupational goals. It is possible that they will consent to possibilities and connect to

occupational aspirations when the starting point is their identity: 'it is appropriate for me, and my capabilities', 'the result of a choice', 'this is out of recognition of what I did at school.'

It is evident that these girls had the ability to connect between their needs and desires and the reality of life. These girls, who grew up in living conditions that gave them a large sense of entitlement to want and shape their lives according to their wills, are willing to try and experiment

with training that will advance their aspirations. Deriving their value from past support and successes, they seek options to recognise their resources or a particular talent featured in the process of developing overall occupational efficacy. The workshop is seen as a space that allows them to design occupational aspirations based on a sense of security and broadening the sense of entitlement, by providing access to additional options. One can assume that their response to the workshop dialogue helped them define a range of needs, and to look for ways to obtain the resources that were missing, and to continue on their path.

Discussion

Occupational aspiration – Between rejection and encouragement

The literature addressing the complex employment barriers faced by stigmatised youth emphasises (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007) their ability to respond to changing living conditions, and to adjust relevant skills to match ever-changing needs. Simultaneously, the literature emphasises the importance of occupational flexibility (Nightingale, Smith, Pindus Trutko & Egner, 2002), defining it as the ability to identify opportunities and actualise them. In accordance with this, 'extra assistance' is supposed to increase girls' ability to manage better stigmatising structures and minimal opportunities. *Reshatot* tried to infuse its content with socio-political concepts to address the influence of social structures on the individual. This was done in order to help girls draw occupational pathways between the existing resources they have in their worlds and the occupational aspirations they were working to build.

The current study shows that the political awareness that formed a part of the workshop structure and that was infused along the way was insufficient. In order to reach the participants, an understanding of their locations and identities is needed. Additionally, the girls' sense of entitlement in relation to their individual needs was an element that was discovered to be of primary importance. The greater a girl's sense of separateness and the greater her ability to express individual needs, the higher her level of response to the workshop and its messages will be. Without a sense of entitlement to display separate individual needs, expanding their

occupational aspirations beyond existing familiar and safe boundaries is difficult.

The sense of entitlement is influenced by the girls' place within their network of family relationships and previous experiences in institutional frameworks (i.e. school). It seems that wise and cautious mediatory dialogue is necessary, dialogue which takes the personal sense of entitlement, the girls' current self-image, and the desired and accessible occupational image into account. In addition to other factors such as age, status, national origin, gender, sexual identity and disability, sense of entitlement also affects responsiveness to the workshop. In order to be able to relate to the workshop as 'extra feminist assistance' and in order for it to be effective, the existing needs and resources each girl's world must be considered. This will enable her to set suitable occupational aspirations.

The level of development of the sense of entitlement can be explained through Suad Joseph's concept of 'connectivity' (Joseph, 1993). Joseph (1993) defined connectivity as a model of relationships, which makes it difficult for the girl to establish a 'self' with needs separate from those of her family. Meaning, identity position is a function of the level of connectivity each girl experiences.

So, one can point out the connection between the girls' degree of connectivity and the level of response to and acceptance of the content of the workshop. 'Repulsion' is usually linked to connectivity which restricts the identity and personal resources in favour of traditional gender roles in the home (Joseph, 1993). 'Cautious negotiation' is linked to the experience of connectivity that is less binding, which allows for "bargaining with patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1988) in a way that is likely to expand their manoeuvrability, whilst maintaining connection and belonging. 'Reluctant acceptance,' was found in girls developing within a relationship, "self in relation" (Jordan et al., 1999). These girls experienced entitlement and support, and it seems that they dared to try and cross the known boundaries.

Girls that experiences restrictive connectivity, tended to conduct negotiation that 'repulsed' the content of the workshop which they saw as irrelevant. Throughout the workshop, girls whose lack of belief in of abilities and resources became stronger in the absence of adequate support (Joseph, 1993), experienced their sense of entitlement being reduced, because of the incompatibility of the program. With the task of developing faith in their abilities to develop occupational aspirations, these girls tended to recreate the experiences of failure and of a bruised occupational history. This recreation reinforced their lack of belief in their ability to achieve an occupational future. Bound within the fabric of the household needs, they continued to strengthen their sense of 'self' by addressing the needs of those around them and defining themselves as 'good girls' (Joseph, 1993). It is possible that as a part of a reconstruction avoidance strategy as the experience of failure threatens, they rejected much of the content of the workshop which could connect

them with future aspirations. For the ‘repulsion’ girls, extra feminist assistance’ requires mediation that is gentle and gradual, providing instrumental solutions to current needs, prior to addressing social structures. Without gradual mediation, the content is experienced by them as reinforcing stigma and the sense of self blame and shame.

Girls that experience less binding connectivity that allows part of their needs to have a voice, appearance, and expression, conduct ‘cautious negotiation’ with the content of the workshop, and try to expand their sense of worth. This process takes place through dialogue that develops between the support they draw from voices that encourage faith in their abilities, and the doubt that arises from the voices that question their belonging and strengthen the stigma. These girls validate the value of the ‘good student’ identity, and bargain with the surrounding patriarchal structures (Kandiyoti, 1988). They check and oppose the boundaries while placating and being cautious to prevent their circle of belonging from unraveling or from breaking out to spaces that are experienced as foreign and threatening. They find it difficult to step outside the ‘women’s niche’ and the academic framework, and challenge the security needs instead of establishing worthy occupational aspirations in new spaces

‘Extra feminist assistance’ for girls conducting cautious negotiation must allow them to find a way to bring these foreign spaces into their worlds. But this must be without threatening their sense of competence, and without arousing concerns about the loss of sources of support. The support that the intervention process provides for them needs to give them a sense of security, knowledge, and connection that can allow the girls to challenge and resist the labelling within dialogue that helps to bridge the gap between what is known to what is less known to them. Such help can allow the girls to expand towards ‘reluctant acceptance,’

The third group is the girls who conducted ‘reluctant acceptance’ and experienced enabling and reciprocal connectivity in their families. Their families’ fostered connection defined as “growth in relation” (Jordan et al., 1999), which allowed the expansion of sense of entitlement and security. The experience of good and supportive connections allow these girls to experiment and challenge themselves through the process of clarifying new and broader opportunities. These girls are less fearful of experiencing failure. The support that the workshop offers can help them expand their range of familiar occupations, while using the knowledge and skills of networking.

In conclusion, in order to reduce the processes of shaming and guilt faced by girls facing ongoing and scarring stigmas, it is necessary to find a way to help these girls achieve worthwhile economic independence. The importance of paving this way is raised in light of neo-liberal conditions, which place responsibility for

success on the individual, demands not accompanied by adequate help.

This article followed the distinctive negotiations of girls in the *Reshatot* workshop, whose stated goal was to help them develop occupational aspirations. The aim of this article is to point out the connection between the girls' starting points and the characteristics of their dialogue and degree of compliance. Extra feminist assistance can minimise the stigmatising and debilitating conditions in the current state of public policy, and promote economic independence in the lives of girls, by encouraging them to internalise messages of occupational efficacy.

NOTE

- 1 All names used to identify interviewees are pseudonyms.
- 2 JDC's mission in Israel is to represent North America's Jewish Federations in helping Israeli society enhance its own capacity to meet the needs of its weakest and least fortunate members.

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