

PROFESSION BEAUTICIAN. FRAGILE BALANCE BETWEEN THEIR AMBITIONS AND WISHES

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Most beauticians are generally female. For Bourdieu¹ it is no coincidence that some professions that involve the provision of services and care, as well as the socio-medical service sector are *a fortiori* female occupations. Such occupations include in their practice two traditional lines of female action: caretaking and housekeeping. In Greece, the first private schools of one year studies have been established in 1962 whilst in 1969 the Act 361/69 defines prerequisites for the beauticians' degree as well as professional licence. Nowadays graduated beauticians from the Technological Educational Institutes belong to the tertiary education and are classified as health professions or they graduate from private colleges and vocational training institutes. In the case of certified beauticians professional status is also combined with entrepreneurial activity, in a smaller or greater range, given the service provision and the sale of products.

This case study concerns certified beauticians with their own "*laboratory*", as the beauticians themselves call their workplace.² In the context of this work, we will focus on some issues related with beauticians' daily lives and reflect the efforts of balancing family and professional spheres, in the current socio-economic conditions of crisis, with everything that this entails. The interviews were conducted in different parts of Attica during the months of May,

1. Bourdieu, 2002, p. 153.

2. I would like to thank the participating beauticians, as well as the members of the Graduate Beauticians Associations Federation that assisted in detecting the landscape.

June and July 2016 either at any interval between their scheduled business appointments, in the morning before work, or late at night. During almost all the interviews, time pressure on the part of the interviewed was evident, while in some cases, meetings had to be postponed. Our study concentrates on ten women beauticians of young age that also have young children. Their age is between 32-38 years, except for two beauticians 46 years old and 50 years old. All participants are in marital cohabitation. Most of their children are of a preschool age.

1. Life and career plan

The beauticians who participated in our study do not have similar social background while their social capital varies. Their partners and parents have different educational levels and different professions. In four cases, the choice of studies appears to be strongly influenced by the family environment of the participants, specifically the occupation of their parents or first degree relatives. In some cases, first selection of their field of study was medicine, however they appear satisfied with their academic and professional development. They are versatile and operate in more than one area and type of beauty services, presenting a wide range of interests and expertise. Among the reported activities, professional makeup television shows, teaching at vocational aesthetics training courses (Technological Educational Institutes-TEI, or Institutes of Vocational Training-IEK) and social aesthetics are included.

The fact that most participants were undergoing the third decade of their life, a period that according to the international literature³ is crucial in terms of professional development and fulfilment of their personal life and the launching of life plan and career. The following findings emerge regarding questions on maternity, childbearing and cohabitation:

3. Clark, 2000, Pickard, 2016.

a) The desired number of children

Many participants have one or more young children and the prospect of having children is still an open desire. Basic regulatory factor regarding the suspension of their desire to have more children seems to be their increased professional obligations, the reduced income and the simultaneously increased working hours, as well as the general fluid environment of the current economic crisis.

It seems that there is a dividing line between those who currently invest forces and resources to the expansion and sustained growth of their business, or else their laboratory, *“because I love my work very much, I feel that when I leave, I escape”* and those who say they have to *“withdraw”* for a while, to meet their family desires. Their responses reveal the *“suspension”* of their professional aspirations. As a beautician says, *“as children grow up, I hope that the work will go better, now I do not think I have time to do more”*. Also the fact that younger age participants started their business within the crisis worked from the outset as a restriction to the possibility of having paid services of infant childcare. So, when ascending relatives are not present, the desire is limited. Moreover no one of the respondents interrupted their work during pregnancy or the period after pregnancy for more than twenty days. The feeling that along with maternity and children responsibility, childcare also correlates to their personal responsibility and duty was expressed by nearly all respondents.

b) The role of the husband

These are families where the couple equally contributes to the family income, but without an equal division regarding the practical arrangements and managing of everyday life. However, male partners were presented as supportive to the professional occupation of their spouses. It is also worth noting that the beauticians' narratives reflected similar effort and fatigue at the end of each workday, mainly due to the intensity of their employment. Instead, in many cases, the distribution of obligations and responsibilities is more equally balanced during the weekend.

c) In search of balance between family and professional sphere

The profession of a beautician, for the participants to our research, requires knowledge, physical strength, honesty, courtesy, tact, communicative flair, sincerity, to meet with success in their professional role. They are switching constantly between the role of the professional and the role of the mother, “*juggling between appointments, and baby-bottles*”. Further, the composite dipole child-family as well as from one customer to another, leaves them by the end of the day “*drained of all energy*”. The final assessment balances sometimes in favour of family responsibilities and other times, in favour of professional responsibilities, thus accomplishing the impossible “*to keep everybody happy*”.

In cases where the contribution from informal family networks or paid services is present, physical fatigue goes away, giving however its position to “*remorse and guilt*” towards family members, and “*satisfaction*” towards professional activity. However, both strategies do not include the concept of leisure.

2. Assessment of the current situation and prospects

The differentiations among the beauticians of our research population are associated with the start-up period of their professional and entrepreneurial activity. Given that in most cases, beauticians became active during the crisis, their words reflect a spirit of compromise considering the circumstances. The newest beauticians appear more optimistic as “*work will always exist*”. The major changes relate to the reduction of the frequency of visits and treatments, especially during seasonal months, the entry of new actors –medical specialties involved in the fields of beauty–, the unfair competition from unregistered beauticians offering their services to customers at home without the burden of a declared business,⁴ and the continued increases in fixed

4. In an interview with members of our Graduate Beauticians Associations Federation was also noted that some of their colleagues closed their business and

costs and taxes on services. Crisis affects the total amount of service, and their quality in the sense of frequency of expensive services. Some beauticians having to cope with the general unfavourable economic and business environment are trying to change the difficult situation into an opportunity, renewing their laboratory with new machines and recruiting staff trained in new techniques and fields such as the recent emergence of social beauty treatment.

Conclusion

We would say that the practice of the beauty treatment profession combined with the entrepreneurial activity requires increased knowledge and skills. During the crisis, maintaining and expanding customer base becomes a difficult endeavour. For the women beauticians the current crisis influenced their professional life as it has contributed to the increase of working hours and the reduction of the cost of their services, producing also serious dilemmas concerning the already fragile balance of work and family life. These dilemmas regarding the prioritization and needs between the professional and family sphere lead some of them to a forced decrease of business activity for the benefit of family life for a limited period. At the same time the growing potentiality of their professional endeavours pushes them to change their life and family plan.

continued the activity at their home. It seems that currently this practice has been intensified after the recent fiscal measures and the continuation of the financial crisis

Selected bibliography

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