

Coping with College Series

Shakespeare's Sister and Women's Career Development

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The great English writer Virginia Woolf once pondered (in "A Room of One's Own") the wholly different lives that unfolded for Shakespeare and an equally talented, hypothetical sister Judith.

William's life was filled with time to write. He had acclaim and support of his talent and he achieved economic comfort and emotional security. Judith's life took totally different turns. Circumstances carried her down roads filled with self-doubt, poverty and eventual obscurity.

Woolf's point was that gender makes a big difference. It did during Shakespeare's time and it still does today.

The work lives of women are not neatly separated from their lives as gendered beings. Women are socialized to doubt and minimize their abilities. They are often encouraged to restrict their consideration of careers to those that parallel the roles of wife, mother or homemaker.

Married women often report working two jobs. One job is during the day and the second job is a night shift filled with child care and housekeeping. Many women report simply being ignored, left to their own devices in figuring out how to make it through high school, college, tough graduate school programs or the workplace advancement track.

Research is clear on what seems to help women succeed in their work life. Having a working mother, supportive father and highly educated parents providing a non-sexist upbringing is beneficial. Continuing math, science and computer course work is key for many jobs and attending girls' schools and women's colleges filled with female role models and clear encouragement for achievement helps.

No marriage or late marriage, to a non-sexist partner with few or no children, facilitates the development of satisfying careers for women. Having a feminist or androgynous world view also contributes positively. Learning to believe and insist one has abilities, the right to "take up space" and get one's needs met seems essential.

Women seeking assistance from Student Counseling Services can tap resources that help them identify interests and abilities, explore personal values and the effective of stereotypes and build self-esteem and a sense of personal direction.