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Sex Role Orientation And Career Model Amongst Females: A Conceptual Framework.

O. Mowalys - Fagbemi

Abstract

As children learn the gender contents of the society, they learn which attributes are to be linked with their own sex and hence with themselves. Adults in child's world are said to rarely notice or remark complementarily on what is considered gender inappropriate, e.g., on how strong a girl is or how nurturant a boy is.

Similarly, the child learns to evaluate his adequacy as a person, in terms of the gender schema, to match his preferences, attributes, behaviours and personal attributes against the prototype scored within it. The gender schema becomes a prescriptive standard or guide, and self-esteem becomes, its hostage.

The present paper examines how sex role orientation pattern takes place and proposes a model towards this and its effects on an individual life.

Introduction

Human beings are no doubt born with certain characteristics, that can be said to separate them from the other animate species of the planet, and from each other in specific ways (Condry, 1984). Human beings are also labelled on two sex or gender poles: girl or boy, man or woman, male or female, masculine or feminine. The mere mention of any of these words conjures up different mental images and pictures, usually on the basis of the belief(s) and stereotype(s) held about what makes up a sex and gender in any culture. Gender is that which seems to divide the human species most completely into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories.

In every culture, some social roles are played by males and others by females. It is believed that no culture of either the past or the present is, or has

been free of some form of gender-role differentiation. Within a culture in which occupational and social roles are sex-typed, individuals are believed to commonly ascribe to themselves, throughout the course of development, certain gender-appropriate attitudes, values and behaviours (Condry, 1984). This probably explains why psychologists have argued that differentiation according to gender is more than ordinary biological programming but includes other ascribed social behaviours, attitudes and interpersonal relationships (Eson and Wilkinson, 1975; Jongeward and Scott, 1976; Rothman, 1978).

There is also the argument that gender-role stereotypes play an important role in the socialisation experiences of many females. More often than not, the socialisation process for females is geared towards their future role(s) of wife, mother and homemaker. This perception cuts across most cultures.

As noted, societal perception across cultures is that a woman's place is in the home. Thus, for vocations, sewing, nursing and the like, were thoughts to be the best she could do. If she does something else apart from the ascribed roles and vocations, the thinking is, "she's not doing what she's supposed to be doing." In fact, Britain, which is among the few countries of the world that have had women Heads of State, even one who served for nine years, and made history as the country's longest serving Prime Minister was as late as the middle of the last century, so stereotypic about sex roles that women were not admitted into British Universities. When eventually they could, they were not allowed to sit the qualifying examinations, which meant in effect that they could not graduate. After the graduation battle had been won, women had another hurdle to cross; they could not gain employment because nobody would employ a woman! (Onabamiro, 1980).

To buttress the above view point, researchers such as Adamek (1970); Cohen, Tomlinson, and

Keasey (1980), Grouze and Nadelman (1980); have suggested that gender and its "accompanied" socialization may affect the orientation of females, their career and life-goals. Within the Nigerian culture, the society has not been liberal enough to produce a female Head of State. However, the society is gradually changing its conception of what a female is, what she can do, and how far she can go. This no doubt accounts for why, since the nation's independence, more females have been going in for university degrees. But then, it is to be noted that even within the realm of academics, there is a "subtle" limit to how far women are "allowed" to go, because of cultural restrictions and the psychological effects that the restrictions produce.

However, this situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. For example, Ironside (1982) noted that in America, in spite of equal opportunities in that country, the position of women in academics appears to have changed very little over the past several decades. Ironside went on to note that while this may be particularly explained by the fact that women as a group earn fewer doctorates than men, there appears to be more fundamental barriers, as well as differential socialisation, occupational stereotyping and male traditions and values, which are prevalent in higher education institutions.

For this reason, an alternative conceptualisation was thought necessary (Dem, 1974). It was proposed that an individual could at the same time, be both "masculine" and "feminine" in terms of cultural behavioural characteristics. This was termed psychological androgyny. Thus, for over two decades, now, the study of psychological androgyny has become a major focus of research in many parts of the world (Lenny, 1991).

A woman who is psychologically androgynous may not be stereotypical in behaviour. To that extent, a woman may not feel out of place, if she finds herself doing what she, as a woman is not "supposed" to be doing or being where she's not "supposed" to be; like being in a male dominated profession, of which university academics is one. Rather she's flexible and may not use gender as a "focus of control" in behaviour.

In spite of the foregoing, some women have made the choice of going in for academic careers and professions "deemed" not for them and have succeeded there in. Thus, it appears that classification of people on the basis of stereotypes may sometimes prove to be inaccurate. In fact, stereotypes can be viewed as stylised exaggerations of women (and men) that are assumed to reflect "a grain of truth" (Unger and Slitter, 1974). If this is noted, then there will be a better understanding of sex role identity among women and career choice. Human nature differs, and this applies to women too, especially as regards their sex role orientation and their career choice.

Finally, it must be noted that the "understanding" of human nature, behaviour and actions is a crucial concern in any field of psychology. This is especially so if one would agree with the suggestion of O'Leary (1977) that as psychology moves toward a better understanding of women, it has the potential to move towards a better understanding of human kind.

Theories of Sex Role Development

The Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud hypothesised that psychological differentiation between the sexes begins between the ages of three and five. At this period, identification is said to occur with the same sex parent. The formation of the super-ego begins. The super-ego includes idealised standards of behaviour. The development of masculine and feminine ideal standards results in the behavioural differences between males and females. While identifying with the same-sex parent, the child internalises social standards of behaviour from the parent. The girl according to Freud turns to the father because of her disappointments with her mother and because of penis envy, her own oedipal complex thus results. Females however are believed to never resolve this conflict, because of this, the female superego is said to be weaker than that of the male (Freud, 1950).

However, of note is that various studies on the theory of penis envy has disproved rather than prove the theory (Bardwick 1971; Kreidler and

Kreitler, 1966).

There is also the contradictory view that the female super ego is weaker than the males and that a child's identification with his or her same-sex parent is a crucial determinant of sex typing (Maccoby and Jaclyn, 1974; Sherman, 1975).

The Social - Learning Theory

The social-learning theories propose that reinforcement, imitation and modeling are important in the acquisition of gender appropriate behaviours. The parents, who are the social agents help shape the child in various ways, positively reinforcing desired behaviours and punishing those that are unacceptable.

Social-learning explanations for the acquisition of gender-appropriate behaviour centres on the concept of observation or imitative learning. Before imitation, identification takes place. To the social-learning theorists, sex-typed behaviours are acquired through selective identification with and imitation of same-sex models, in particular, the parents (Bandura, 1969; Mischel, 1970). However, empirical studies suggest that parents don't rely on direct positive reinforcement, rather negative reinforcement is made use of. Some also hold contradictory view for the contention that children are more likely to imitate the behaviour of the same-sex parent.

Furthermore, correlational studies fail to reveal consistent similarities or behaviour between child and same-sex parent. It is suggested that it is the sex-typed attributes of the model, not the model's per se that facilitates the adoption of gender role. Evidence also seem to suggest a critical role of the opposite-sex parent in the development of sex-types behaviour through reciprocal role learning (Maccoby Jackline, 1974; Stein and Bailey, 1973).

Another criticism is that the social learning theorists treat the child as a passive recipient of environmental forces rather than an active agent striving to comprehend and organise his world. On this, Bem (1983) noted that the passive child is inconsistent with the common observation that children themselves, frequently construct and enforce their own version of society's gender roles.

She further analysed that, it is "inconsistent" with the fact that the flexibility with which children interpret society's gender roles varies predictably with age. In one of her reports, for example, 73 percent of the four-year olds and 80 percent of the nine year olds believed quite flexibly, that there should be no sexual restrictions on one's choice of occupation. Between these ages, children held more rigid opinions, with the middle children being the least flexible of all. Thus, only 33 percent of the five year olds, 10 percent of the six year olds, 11 percent of the seven year olds and 44 percent of the eight year olds believed there should be no sexual restrictions on one's choice of occupation (Bem 1983, Damon, 1977). It would appear therefore that a child's environmental experiences and intelligence can mediate in the acquisition of gender behaviour.

Cognitive Developmental Theorists

To the cognitive theorists, a child's ability to differentiate between gender roles and to categorise himself or herself as male/female precedes, rather than follow identification. On the basis of physical evidence, and sex differences in clothing, hairstyle, and other characteristic activities a child develops the conception of his or her sexual identity. Once this has been made, it becomes reinforcing to behave in a manner appropriate for one's sex roles and to imitate same models.

The cognitive theorist would like us to believe that sex typing follows naturally and inevitably from universal principle of cognitive development. That, as children work actively to comprehend their social world, they inevitably, according to Lewis and Brooks - Funn, (1980):

label themselves... and determine that there are alphas and betas in the environment. Given the cognitive-motivational properties of the self..., the child moves towards other alphas and away from betas. That is, it is the child who realizes what gender he or she is, and in what behaviours he or she should

Kohlberg (1966) also postulate that:

Basic self-categorizations determine valuations once the boy has stably identified himself as male, he then values positively those objects and acts consistent with his gender identity (P.89).

Many have criticised this view. For example, Bem (1983) was of the view, that the theory fails to explicate why sex will have primary over other potential categories of the self such as race, religion, or even eye color. She went on to say that the question of whether and why sex has cognitive primary is not included within the bounds of cognitive developmental theory.

To understand why children become sex typed rather than, say race or caste typed, we still need a theory that explicitly addresses the question of how and why children come to utilize sex in particular as a cognizing principle (P.602)

Another criticism of Kohlberg's theory relates to the proposition that the acquisition of gender identity is contingent upon mental maturity. The argument is that if this is so, then young children who engage in sex-typed behaviour should have more knowledge about sex role stereotypes than those who do not. This is however said not to be supported empirically. Moreover, the theory does not explain how particular sets of sex-typed behaviours are adopted (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974)

In view of the flaws inherent in the cognitive theory a more integrated cognitive model was proposed by Block (1973).

To Block, sex-role definitions represent a synthesis of biological and cultural forces, this is modified at the individual's level of cognitive and ego development. The concept of gender is too sophisticated and irrelevant to the infant at the

impulse-ridden level but the infant begins to develop primitive notions about gender and to apply the label "girl" or "boy" differentially. It is not until the same years later that sex-role stereotypes are established and the culturally approved male and female behaviours in any given society are adopted. Then boys are encouraged to control the expression of emotion, and girls to control the expression of aggression. Maleness or femaleness is then established. The internalisation of social values and norms however, does not occur until the conscientious stage, when the individual's own values are weighted against those set forth by society.

Gender - Schema Theory

Gender Schema Theory incorporates features of the cognitive developmental and the social learning accounts of sex-typing. Gender Schema Theory proposes that sex typing derives in large measure from gender schematic process from a generalised readiness on the part of the child to encode and to organise information including information about self according to the culture's definition of maleness.

A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of association that organises and guides an individual's perception. A schema functions as an anticipatory structure, a readiness to search for and to assimilate incoming information in schema relevant terms (Bem, 1981b). Gender schema theory proposes that the phenomenon of sex typing derives from gender-based schematic process from a generalised readiness to process information and sort out attributes on the basis of the sex-linked association that constitute the gender schema. That is, not masculine and feminine categories, or "equivalent classes", regardless of the difference on a variety of dimensions unrelated to gender.

Thus, items like "tender" and "nightingale" are placed into a feminine category, and items like "assertive" and "eagle" into a masculine category.

The Conceptual Framework

In view of the socialisation experiences of female, a woman may find herself faced with many choices

such a "choice" could be likened to the choice a soldier is faced with at the time of battle. In deciding whether to expose himself to the dangers of battle, the soldier may well reason that he is personally better off by avoiding the dangers, regardless of what his colleagues do. To be acceptable to his comrades however, he may join the battle and face death (Dawes, 1980). So also, a woman, being pulled by different societal forces, may well reason, that she is better off doing what she wants to do, and thereby suffer "rejection" because of her deviancy from the norm, or alternatively, she may crave for "acceptance", and thus join the norm by conforming to the stereotype. Some others may seek a sort of "mid-way" neither "here nor there". Such a woman will at some point in time, behave stereotypically, and at other time, refuse to conform. Thus, she may not suffer "total rejection", and at the same is "acceptable" to some. A flexible behavioural woman may well behave like this.

Psychological disposition relating to gender roles and behaviour thereof

Sex role orientation, fear of success, fear of failure and other dispositions resulting from the bio-social level (1st level) will interact with the second level before one gets to the third level where one would have made a decision and patterns of decision would manifest. It is at this level that one would have been able to resolve any and all conflicts that may have arisen at the first and second levels. Thus, at this level, one would have been able to

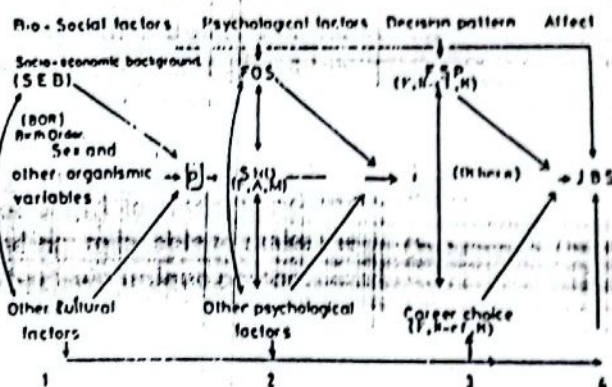
decide on one's professional liking and career. Thus, one may, all background factors considered, be able to move into a gender inappropriate profession but which one is endowed for, or one may choose a profession that is gender appropriate. For example, women engineers and men nurses.

At the final stage of the sex role model, there will be manifestations of all choices one has made hitherto, the personality would have been formed.

Thus one's behavioural pattern can affect several aspects of one's life. For example, it can determine one's choice of career, it can affect how one responds to one's environment, which could equally determine things like job satisfaction, etc.

As conceptualised in Figure 1, an individual's sex role identity begins and is influenced by different biological and social factors. The biological variables relate more to that which is as a result of contributions from one's family gender and one's own sex and intelligence amongst others while the social variables, including such factors like age, socio-economic background, having literate or illiterate parents can influence one's sex role identity, for as argued by Mowaye (1995) belonging to the higher echelon of the socio-economic ladder may influence one to be flexible as regards gender stereotypes. Other factors belonging to the social organismic variables include having a supportive home environment which could be in form of one's parents, guardian or husband and a loving home. All these factors could be influences and may determine how flexible one is in terms of gender role behaviour.

Figure 1: Sex Role Identity and Career Model



FOS Fear of success, BOR Birth order, SED Socio-economic background, FSP Field of specialization, JBS Job Satisfaction, SRO Sex role orientation, FAM Feminine, androgynous, masculine, F.N.-cf.M - Feminine, non-conforming masculine [P] Personality

As observed in Fig.1, the bio-social factors interact with other cultural factors to influence one's world and would begin to determine things like one's self esteem as well as affect many other things. If the decision one has made at the third stage is right, all things considered, then one will exhibit and respond appropriately. For example, if one has made a wrong decision at level three, maybe one is endowed intelligently but as a result of the level of education of one's parents and other cultural constraints, one felt compelled to go in for a career that is culturally gender appropriate, one may find no satisfaction in such a job and one would always feel miserable on the job. Making the right decision at level three is therefore very important. Especially one that an individual knows he can live with, to be able to make meaning out of life.

Conclusion

The paper has examined varied factors interacting with psychological factors to determine one's career choice and its affects. The interactions of the various levels were stressed and the importance of making the right choice was emphasised.

The mind being a tabula-rasa at birth, it is what is inscribed at birth that becomes imprinted on the mind. This being so, many environmental factors interplay to affect a person's personality make-up, such factors include birth order, socio-economic background innate intelligence and other cultural factors. The personality make-up further influences decision pattern and career choice and this equally affect many other things like job satisfaction. It is therefore essential to give a free reign to a girl without social prejudice as regards gender roles for her to put up the maximal output she can academically and professionally. It is equally important for a girl to understand the forces working around her to be able to make the choice that best suits her own unique person.

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