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Perceived Sex Role and Fear of Success: A Study of Urban Working Women in Nigeria

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to determine whether relationships exist between sex roles and fear of success. Bem Sex Role Inventory Short Form (BSRISF) and Fear of Success Scale (FOSS) were administered to 110 working urban women in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. The age range of sample was 21-60 years (Mean = 41.07 and S.D. = 10.74). The scores for the masculinity and feminity scales were derived by summing appropriate item scores of BSRISF. Correlation, a statistical method, was applied to see whether there is a significant relationship between masculine and feminine characteristics. The correlation among above mentioned variables was positively significant (0. 23, $p<0.05$). It shows androgynous trends in urban working women. However, fear of success has been negatively correlated with both masculine scores (-0.25, $p<0.01$) and feminine scores (-0.24, $p<0.05$). Total sample (110 Subjects) was divided as masculine 19, feminine 29 androgynous 32 and undifferentiated 30 sex role groups by taking median values on femininity and masculinity scale. The undifferentiated sex role group (M = 12.10 and SD = 4.16) had highest fear of success scores among these groups and mean differences statistically calculated were significant ($p<0.05$), when compared with androgynous sex role group. Whereas androgynous had lowest fear of success scores (M = 9.37 and SD = 4.94) among these groups and mean differences statistically calculated were significant ($p<0.05$), when compared with feminine category. Other comparisons of mean were observed to be non-significant. The present study suggests that it is psychological femininity or undiferentiated sex roles rather than actual femininity that predisposes people to fear of success.

Key words: Sex-role, fear of success, femininity, masculinity, urban working women

INTRODUCTION

Martina Horner (1972) in described fear of success in women as a type of internal psychological pressure which limits ambition and achievement. The question of whether women are less ambitious than men is difficult to assess. Throughout history women have not always been able to achieve some of the ambitions they may have harbored because of the often restrictive nature of the society around them and partly due to the constraints of child bearing and subsequent parenting. In contrast, men have usually been encouraged to be successful and be a bread winner. Women today, have greater dominance, self-acceptance, empathy, achievement and independence, indeed much of this change is recently attributed directly to the women's movement itself. The characteristics required for high-powered jobs are much closer to male stereotypes such as being bold, assertive, tough and aggressive. Female stereotypes of being kind, sensitive, emotional and passive put them at a competitive disadvantage.

Societal values and expectations perpetuate gender role stereotypes in a culture and mandate males to be masculine and female to be feminine. Stereotypes of gender roles created by a culture govern our way of life throughout our existence. Bem (1998) concluded that the gender discrimination that women face in society is motherhood. Singh and Agrawal (2006) found in their study that females have gradually been adapting masculine characteristics with their own inherited feminine chacteristics in recent trends.

Attitudes, behavior, rights and responsibilities that a society associates with each sex are known as gender roles (Holt and Ellis, 1998). A person may be described as masculine, as feminine, as androgynous, that is, having charateristics of both, or as undifferentiated, that are, having neither strong masculine nor strong feminine characteristics. Masculine and feminine roles are not opposite ends of the same continuum but are instead two separate dimensions (Ben, 1977). According to Powell and Butterfly (1989), people who are androgynous are believed to be more effective because they can perform both the instrumental, directive, or masculine roles and the expressive nurturing, or feminine roles. Age, race and social class further define individuals role, which influence how men and women interract and the attitudes and behaviors expected of each (Lindsey, 1994).

Traditional gender roles emphasize separate spheres of influence for women and men, with women inside the home and men outside the home (Duncan *et al*., 1997). A modern, or liberal, view of gender roles is that both men and women may engage in behaviors that have traditionally been ascribed to their either sex (Blee and Tickamyer, 1995). According to the liberal view, women may occupy leadership positions in the workplace, be autonomous and also be nurturing.

Similarly, men may provide childcare at home and still remain achievement-oriented in the workplace. Broverman *et al*. (1970) discussed that while there is not much support for applying different standards of mental health to women and men based on biological differences, there was support that it is more socially desirable to have masculine traits. It is no small wonder that the profile for a healthy man was more desirable. Woosley (1977) touched on social desirability when discussing how the socially valued items of competence and individual achievement were incompatible with the female sex role.

Fear of success is the fear that all that is set out will be accomplished, but happiness, contentment and satisfaction will not be there even after reaching the goal. It is the belief of being undeserved of all the good things and recognition that come in the way as a result of accomplishments and success. It also means others are others who are better, who will replace or displace if performance records is not maintained. Anticipation of negative consequences and sex role has been found to contribute to fear of success.

Fleming's (1975) studies suggests that fear of success has to do with negative consequences of a person standing out in some ways or being assertive in relation to another more powerful group which may punish the individual for being assertive. Canavan *et al*. (1978) appeared to postulate that the success-fearing person is in conflict over success and tends both to approach it and avoid it. Such a person adopts an intermediate distance from success rather than putting it as far away from himself or herself as possible. The concept of fear of success has now stimulated a considerable literature. It was devised to explain conflicts over achievement experienced by women. Men turn out to be just as success-fearing as women. It is not universal among women and not unique to women (McClelland, 1987).

Major (1979) reported that it is psychological feminity rather than actual femininity that predisposes people to fear of success. Women also have fewer same-sex role models in high-powered jobs who they can attempt to emulate, unlike men where such role models are abundant (Baron and Byrne, 1991). Woolsey (1977) found that femininity was incompatible with the socially highly valued items of competence and individual achievement and that this leads to ambivalence, fear of success, guilt and anxiety in women.

This study is designed to examine the association between sex role and fear of success in the Nigerian urban working women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total sample of 110 working females was randomly drawn from the urban areas of Lagos, Nigeria. The broad age range (21-60 years) of the sample was taken with a mean of 41.07 and standard deviation of 10.74. The sampled women were personally approached and asked to complete both the Fear of Success Scale form (FOSS) and Bem Sex Role Inventory Form (BSRISF).

Fear of Success Scale form is a 29 items test designed by Good and Good (1973) to assess individual differences in the motive to avoid success. Responses in terms of true or false were recorded. The test was reported to be highly reliable and valid.

Bem Sex Role Inventory Short Form Test (BSRISF) by Bem (1981) is a 30 item adaptation of Bem's original inventory designed to investgate masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions of sex role identity. Respondents are asked to rate themselves as to how well ten stereotypically masculine adjectives (such as assertive, has leadership abilities, dominant); 10 stereotypically feminine adjectives (such as affectionate, compassionate, warm) and ten neutral adjectives describe them. Respondents indicate how well each item describes them on a 7-point scale with end points never or almost never true 1 and always or almost always true 7. Scores on the BSRISF are purported to measure the respondents degree of masculine and feminine characteristics and by further division on the basis of median values of these scores, four sex roles (masculinity, femininity androgynous or undifferentiated sex role identity) can be obtained. BSRISF correlates highly with the original version, with coefficients ranging from 0.87-0.94. Internal consistency and reliability are generally considered acceptable with estimates ranging from 0.75-0.87. It is generally accepted that the 30 item short form of the bem sex role inventory is psychometrically superior to the original version and should be used when assessing sex role identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean scores, standard deviations and correlations to examine the relationship among different variables.

Table 1: Mean scores with standard deviations and correlations between masculine, feminine feminine characteristics and FOS scores

Chacteristics (N = 110)	Mean	+S.D. -	Masculine chacteristics	Feminine chacteristics	FOS
Masculine Characteristics	45.10	8.54	1.0		
Feminine Chracteristics	55.05	7.56	0.23*	1.0	
FOS	10.86	4.75	0.25**	0.24*	1.0

**Significant at 0. 01 level, *Significant at 0. 05 level

As shown in Table 1 mean scores were higher for feminine characteristics in urban working women. It indicates that feminine chacteristics were shown by more number of women as compared to masculine characteristics. However, taking into account that they were female respondents, they had considerably high scores for masculine characteristics. As shown in Table 1, masculine characteristics were significantly positively correlated ($p<0.05$, 0.23) with feminine chacteristics in Nigerian urban working women. Whereas, both masculine as well as feminine chacteristics were significantly negatively correlated ($p<0.01$, -0.25 and $p<0.05$, -0.24, respectively) with fear success. It leads us to the understanding that women might be moving towards androgyny, that is, possession of both feminine as well as masculine characteristics and also becoming less fearful of their success. Fear of success is not universal among women and also not unique to women (McClelland, 1987). Davis *et al.* (1987) found that the correlation between the FOS scale and feminine orientation is 0.36, while with feminine orientation is -0.28 and androgyny is -0.21. All three correlations were significant. Major (1979) reported that it is psychological femininity rather than actual femininity that predisposes people to fear of success. In other words, although men and women do differ psychologically, they do not differ very much inherently.

Woosley (1977) touched on social desirability when discussing how the socially valued items of competence and individual achievement were incompatible with the female sex role. Also he found that femininity was incompatible with the socially valued items of competence and individual achievement and this led to ambivalence, fear of success, guilt and anxiety in women.

Negative corelation between masculine characteristics and fear of success is also supported by above mentioned studies but negatively significant corelation between feminine characteristics and fear of success might not be supported by most of the studies. This could be due to the fact that feminine chacteristics are negatively correlated with achievement. Therefore, females high in feminine chacteristics might be less motivated to achieve success resulting in less fear of success. Feminine sex- role orientation rather than actual sex (physically male or female) needs further study if we want to get a clearer idea about the relationship between feminine characteristics and fear of success.

Table 2: Mean scores of fos with standard deviations and f-values among three age groups viz., younger, middle and older groups

Age groups (years)	N	Mean	S.D.	F-value
Younger group (20-35)	36	10.56	4.56	0.51
Middle group (36-50)	44	11.05	4.75	
Older group (50-65)	30	11.73	4.81	

As shown in Table 2 mean scores among three age groups were not found significant.

Age factor does not have any effect on fear of success. In another research, Singh and Agrawal (2006) reported that all feminine characteristics except Sympathetic, were found non-significant among diferent age groups. However, masculine characteristics such as Defend my own beliefs, Independent, Have leadership quality, Willing to take risks and total score of masculine characteristics were significantly higher in younger group as compared to other groups. But present research showed that fear of success varies ($F = 0.51$) insignificantly in different age groups. It could then be concluded that fear of succes is not affected by age.

Dividing Masculinity and Femininity scales at the median scores classified those who received above the median on both the scales as Androgynous sex role group. Classified as Masculine sex role group, when they scored above the median on the Masculinity scale and below the median on the Femininity scale. Those above the median on the Femininity scale and below the median on the Masculinity scale were classified as Femininity sex role group. The Undifferentiated sex-role group was the group of subjects scoring below the median on both the scales. Total sample 110 was divided as masculinity 19, femininity 29 androgynous 32 and undifferentiated 30 sex role groups by using above mentioned method. Table 3 shows that females with Undifferentiated sex role had highest mean scores for fear of success and females with Androgynous sex role had lowest mean scores for fear of success. It indicates that Fear of success was highest in undifferentiated group and lowest in androgynous group.

Mean scores of fear of success among four groups were compared to see whether the mean differences were significant. As shown in Table 3, when mean scores of fear of success of Masculinity sex role group were compared with other sex role groups, it was found that mean differences of fear of success of Masculinity sex role with Femininity, Androgyny and Undifferentiated sex role groups were non-significant. Comparison of mean scores of fear of success of Femininity sex role group with other sex role groups led to the finding that mean differences of fear of success of Femininity sex rolle group with Androgyny sex role group were significant (2.12, $p<0.05$). T-test values of mean scores of fear of

Table 3: Mean scores, standard deviation and t-test values of fos in masculinity, femininity and androgyny and undifferentiated sex roles

Sex role types	N	Mean	S.D.	Masculinity	Femininity	Androgyny
Masculinity	19	10.32	4.77			
Femininty	29	11.86	4.13	1.19		
Androgyny	32	9.37	4.94	0.67	2.12*	
Undifferentiated	30	12.10	4.16	1.30	0.20	2.25*

*Significant at 0.05 level

success of two opposite extremes, that is androgyny and undifferentiated sex role groups were again found significant (2.25, $p<0.05$). However, mean scores of fear of success of Androgyny sex role group with other sex role groups were observed non-significant.

Several studies suggest that people tend to attribute the success of males to internal factors such as effort or ability, whereas success for females is often attributed to luck or the task was too easy (Baron and Byrne, 1991). Females stereotypes of being kind, sensitive, emotional and passive put them at a competitive disadvantage (Bardwick, 1971).

Masculinity-Femininity framework suggests that fear of success should be higher among women than men and that the occupational success and satisfaction of women may suffer as a result of the fear success they experience. Pfost and Fiore (1990) found that FOS is more appropriately conceptualized as reflecting conflict between achievement strivings and expectations of negative interpersonal reactions to culturally deviant gender behavior. On the other hand, recent researchers have reported that FOS is more associated with the sex role of individuals and observed that traditional feminine and undifferentiated participants have more FOS as compared to traditional masculine or androgynous and this finding is supported by the present study as well. In summary, the present study suggests that it is psychological femininity or undifferentiated sex roles rather than actual femininity that predisposes people to fear of success.

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