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Influences on Adolescent Females' Career Aspirations:

Home Versus Public Schooling

### Abstract

Sixty-six adolescent females were surveyed to examine the relationship between type of schooling and career aspirations. Of the females between the ages of fourteen and nineteen, seventeen were home-schooled and forty-nine were public schooled. An analysis of career aspirations was based on academic success, parental occupation, and gender role perception. Overall findings indicate that home schooled females tend to be more stereotypical regarding female roles. A statistically significant difference was not found to support the hypothesis that compared to non home schooled females, those who are home schooled are more likely to be interested in stereotypical gender role careers. Further studies need to work on gathering a larger sample.

## Influences on Adolescent Females' Career Aspirations:

### Home Versus Public Schooling

Gender roles are defined by the accepted behaviors, thoughts, and emotions of a specific gender based upon the views of a particular society or culture (AllPsychonline Psychology Dictionary, 2004). Thus, one's identification as being male and female predispose one to engage in behaviors that distinguish him or her from the opposite sex. One could argue that the biological makeup of individuals is the primary element that requires of them a sense of responsibility toward the role society expects of them.

Popular culture has embraced the idea that men and women are different. Social role theory proposes that one reason that women and men confirm gender stereotypes is because they act in accordance with their social roles which are often segregated along gender lines. Consistent with the social role theory, gender roles are normative expectations, learned at an early age, represent consensually shared beliefs and manifest themselves across a wide variety of contexts. Various studies between men and women depict differences which fit stereotypic expectations (Canary and Emmers-Sommer, 1997). For example, women are better at sending and encoding nonverbal messages (Brody, 1996; Brody and Hall, 2000), are more expressive of certain emotions (Manstead, 1998), and are more concerned about maintaining intimacy in their close

relationships than are men (Christensen, 1987, 1988). Men, in contrast are better at controlling their nonverbal expressions (Brody, 1996; Brody and Hall, 2000), are more instrumental and task oriented (Stuhmacher and Walters. 1999; Stuhmacher and Meyer, 1998), and are more concerned about maintaining autonomy in their close relationships than are women (Christensen, 1987, 1988).

Historically, gender differences have been examined quite frequently. What makes a male masculine and a female feminine has its roots in biology and psychology. Over time, many changes have taken place in this research. One of the first tests formed to assess masculinity and femininity was called the Attitude-Interest Analysis Test (AIST) by Terman and Miles (Morawski, 1985). In this rough test form, masculinity was assessed by answering questions that indicate a dislike of foreigners, religious men, clever women, guessing games, and thin women while femininity was assessed by dislike of sideshow freaks, bashful men, bicycle riding, advice giving, bald-headed men, and cautious people (Morawski, 1985). Since, psychology has produced several more empirical ways of measuring masculinity/femininity. One such example is Bem's Sex Role inventory (BSRI) which includes a masculine, feminine, and neutral scale (Ratliff, 1981). This test gives scores based on answers that correspond to the three scales. For example, traits on the feminine scale include yielding, sympathetic, compassionate, on the masculine scale include independent, forceful, aggressive, and on the neutral scale include truthful, likeable, and adaptable (Ratliff, 1981). Although the terms femininity and masculinity are becoming more clearly defined, influencing factors are still being researched.

Assumptions regarding the role a career will play in the lives of female adolescents have changed over time. “As recently as 1969, career development theorists assumed that women’s primary role lay in the domestic rather than her occupation sphere. Moreover, many theorists held that females who sought careers lay outside the norm hence were considered atypical and deviant” (Guttman, p.91). However, today almost all young women will work outside of the home at one point in their lives. While this change cannot be attributed to a change in biological makeup of the population, it seems to be directly linked to socioeconomic changes in society. Thus, the need to look at environmental factors surrounding the individuals, such as the type of family in which they are raised (traditional vs. nontraditional), their educational system, and how they perceive themselves is important.

Research has also been conducted on children to see when and why gender stereotyped careers develop. Stroehrer (1994) researched children’s attitudes to gender-appropriate roles and career aspirations. She randomly selected students in her class and showed them an occupation chart containing gender neutral pictures of seven different occupations (including doctor, astronaut, singer, nurse, police officer, firefighter, and teacher). The children were then asked to specify whether each occupation was a boy job, girl job, or job that both boys and girls could do. Her research concluded that even as kindergarteners, females selected more traditional female careers. The girls “chose traditional female occupations even after indicating an acceptance of females in nontraditional jobs” (Stroehrer, 1994, p. 98). This research seems to indicate that gender occupational stereotypes are formed before school, further evidence that what children see at home is what is formative.

It is important to look at what affects gender in general and career roles specifically. Fiebig says that, “there is only one significant path...the one suggesting that the mothers’ gender role attitudes influences the daughters’ choice of traditional, neutral, and non-traditional female occupations” (2003, p.179). She also goes on to say that, “It has been shown that mothers who are career-oriented or have professional non-traditional career roles have daughters who develop the least traditional attitudes toward family and careers and are less conflicted about growing up and becoming independent women” (Fiebig, 2003, p.165-166).

One study aiming to investigate the factors influencing high school girls’ career motivations, using four criterion variables (career commitment, occupational aspirations, educational aspiration and vocational certainty), suggests that girls who obtained higher marks in school, identified with either masculine or androgynous trait disposition, had more liberal attitudes toward women, and were from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, aspire to higher levels of education (Holms, 313).

Rainey and Borders (1997) also investigated two models of career development. They looked at the early adolescent population for two reasons. One is that children at this age are more liable to limit career options and eliminate possibilities. This means that the early adolescent makes many critical decisions about future possibilities in terms of career choice. These choices tend to then be reinforced as the adolescent matures. The second reason this population was chosen is that this stage has been identified as a critical turning point in the mother/daughter relationship, which may have a direct influence on the developing female (Rainey and Borders, 1997). Rainey and Borders (1997) took a multidimensional approach and examined attachment, psychological

separation, agentic characteristics (those associated with an emphasis on task completion, problem solving, and concern for self as an individual), gender role attitudes, school performance, and maternal characteristics as variables influencing career orientation and career aspirations. They conclude that agentic characteristics and characteristics of the mother contribute to young women's gender role attitudes. Those whose mothers were college educated expressed more liberal views on gender roles than did those whose mothers did not have a college education.

O'Brien and Fassinger (1993) conducted research on adolescent women (final year of high school) to test two causal models of career choice and orientation. In their review, they note that Fassinger's earlier studies in 1990 showed that agentic characteristics and sex role attitudes predict career orientation. They also referenced Betz and Fitzgerald's research that showed that women whose mothers were employed outside the home had higher levels of self-esteem and had more liberal gender role attitudes than those whose mothers were homemakers. O'Brien and Fassinger (1993) therefore included the variable of relationship with mother (indicated by scores on the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment by Armsden & Greenberg, and scores on the Psychological Separation Inventory by Hoffman) in looking at career choice influences. They concluded that the "career decisions of adolescent women are influenced by their ability, agentic characteristics, gender role attitudes, and relationship with their mothers" (O'Brien and Fassinger, 1993, p.466).

Jackson, Ialongo, and Stollak (1986) researched parental correlates of gender roles. Their results indicate that mothers and fathers influenced the development of masculinity and femininity in their children and that the same sex parent was more

influential in the development of these traits. Therefore, if looking at a population of women, it is critical to note that the mother has an influence on daughter's gender role and, in turn, her career aspirations.

Much emphasis has been placed on the biological aspects of gender roles and, in turn, career aspirations. According to the research, maternal influences have been portrayed as a critical factor in influencing career aspirations of adolescent females. The present study will examine how type of schooling affects a female and her career aspirations. Since the mother is a critical part of the home-schooled female's life, she will have greater influence on her daughter than will the mother of a female who is public schooled. Mothers of home-schooled females must be mother as well as teacher and therefore will influence the female's view of herself as a woman and what she is expected to do and is capable of doing. Based on the outcomes of the cited material, it is hypothesized that compared to non-home schooled females, those who are home schooled are more likely to be interested in stereotypical gender-role careers.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants for this study included home schooled and public schooled females. The 17 home schooled participants were adolescent females from Midwestern suburban regions. The 49 public schooled participants were also adolescent females from Midwestern suburban regions, selected from two high schools. Except for age, which ranged from 14-19, demographic information regarding race/ethnicity/socioeconomic class was not included since these variables were irrelevant to the study. Participants from both groups were selected on the basis of a convenience sample.

### *Materials*

A 25 item questionnaire included attitude scales measuring academic achievement and career aspirations, perceptions of women and men's gender roles, self perception and division of labor in household tasks (See Appendix A). Respondents' answers to the questions concerning mother's and father's occupation and profession respondent is most interested in were coded according to the statistics of the Labor Bureau, subdivision of Department of US Labor; Female jobs, neutral jobs, and male jobs.

### *Procedure*

After receiving permission from the principles of the high schools and parents of the home schooled, students were asked to fill out the questionnaire and the data collected was analyzed for the results. For the public schooled group questionnaires were handed out in class and collected in person by the researchers. For those home-schooled, questionnaires were e-mailed and responses were both mailed and e-mailed back to the researchers.

### Results

To examine the main hypothesis, a two sample t-test was conducted between career aspirations and type of schooling,  $t(23) = 0.60$ ,  $p = 0.55$ .

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient produced an  $r(15) = 0.165$ ,  $p = 0.53$ , between academic success and career aspirations. A correlation between Mother's occupation and career aspirations obtained an  $r(15) = 0.395$ ,  $p = 0.117$ . The correlation coefficient between number of years home-schooled and career aspirations was  $r(15) = -0.388$ ,  $p = 0.12$ .

For public schooled participants, A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of  $r(47)=0.377$ ,  $p=0.008$ , was obtained between academic success and career aspirations. For Mother's occupation and career aspirations, the correlation coefficient was  $r(47)=0.252$ ,  $p=0.081$ .

A significant difference was found between the types of schooling in terms of the importance in studying language for women;  $t(21)=-2.65$ ,  $p=0.015$ , and for men,  $t(20)=-2.36$ ,  $p=0.029$  and for the participant herself,  $t(20)=-2.36$ ,  $p=0.029$ .

Home schooled girls had different views on the primary source of income than did public-schooled girls,  $t(31)=-2.46$ ,  $p=0.02$ . Finally, a t-test revealed group differences in the view of men's role in cooking,  $t(33)=-2.07$ ,  $p=0.046$ .

#### Discussion

Contrary to the hypothesis, there seems to be no significant effect of type of schooling per se on career aspirations. This shows that the differences in career aspirations are not due to effects of schooling. They may be more influenced by parenting effects, peer factors, or teacher influences. More in depth research is needed to be able to conclude these propositions. The specific categories show a very slight tendency for home-schoolers to be interested in more gender stereotypical career aspirations, there is not much difference between the two groups. Although it was expected that the majority of home-schooled females would model maternal careers, and therefore be interested in more stereotypical careers, this cannot be concluded due to the small sample size obtained.

The positive correlation, albeit not significant, between academic success and career aspirations for both groups examined, supports the research that females who

perform well academically are more likely to choose neutral or non traditional female careers. Those who perform better in school are more encouraged to develop skills in many disciplines and, therefore, consider various areas of work that may be unavailable to those with fewer skills.

The correlation between mother's occupation and participant's career choice showed a small positive relationship between the two variables. This shows that mother's occupation may have a small influence on daughter's occupational interests. This relationship may be attributed to the identification formation developed between mothers and daughters. Further research could be conducted to examine whether or not fathers influence daughter's aspirations in a similar way.

The high significance level (p value) of the relationship between number of years home schooled and career aspirations allows the conclusion that the tendency to choose stereotypical careers is more likely to increase as the number of years home schooled increases. Exposure to a stay at home parent (usually mother) for a greater number of years seems to be a factor in influencing adolescent career aspirations.

Both home-schoolers and public-schoolers viewed studying language as important for men and women in general and for themselves. However, public schooled females saw studying language as more important than did the home-schooled females. This may be due to the fact that public schoolers are required to study languages as part of the curriculum. It may also be suggested that the growing ethnic diversity in America encourages people to be more culturally aware and to view studying different languages as being important to men, women, and self.

Another way to look at these outcomes would be to presume that there was a misinterpretation of what “language” meant. It is possible that the participants understood the question about “language” as a reference to their verbal abilities. But what the question purported to ask was the importance of studying foreign languages. This could also explain why literature did not appear as significant as language, if the participants viewed that category as a distinct curriculum included in language skills.

Given the small sample size of home schoolers, these results should not be generalized. The failure to attain more participants can be attributed to the fact that many parents that were contacted did not wish their child(ren) to participate in a psychology related study. They voiced strong skepticism in how the results would be used. A larger sample would have provided a more generalizable outcome that may have been more representative of the home-schooled population. Although the results support the null hypothesis, the researchers are optimistic about future research finding statistically significant results illustrating that home schooled females are more likely to be interested in stereotypical female career aspirations.

Future research should include other variables such as religious affiliation and its influence on career aspirations. Greater care needs to be used in explaining the importance of research and ensuring anonymity. A better understanding of the reason for the skepticism encountered in the present study could provide insight into ways of more effectively gathering a home schooled sample.

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13. What kind of profession are you most interested in? \_\_\_\_\_

Rate the following : (**SEVEN** being **most** important)

14. How important is it for **women** to study the following?

math	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
science	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
art (fine arts and music)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
literature and writing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

19. How important is it for **women** to be the primary care-giver in the home?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not important						very important

20. How important is it for **women** to be responsible for the following household chores:

cooking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
cleaning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mowing the lawn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Electrical work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Taking out the garbage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

21. How important is it for **women** to be the primary source of income in a family?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not important						very important

22. How important is it for **men** to study the following?

math	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
science	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
art (fine arts and music)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
literature and writing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

23. How important is it for **men** to be the primary care-giver in the home?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not important						very important

24. How important is it for **men** to be responsible for the following household chores:

cooking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
cleaning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mowing the lawn	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Electrical work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Taking out the garbage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

