PERCEIVED GENDER AND DRIVE FOR SUCCESS

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Are drives for achievement dependent on the perceived gender of an individual? Thirty-six students were randomly selected and assigned to two experimental groups matched by sex. Each group was asked to write a story about an individual who graduated valedictorian of the class, with Group I having a female character and Group II with a male character. The stories were scored based on the percentage of positive statments written about the character. Results showed a higher percentage of positive attributions given to the female character (x=60.77) compared to the male character (x=42.49). The observed t of 2.326 was found to be significant at p .05. While females were perceived to have stronger drives for achievement (or less fear of success) than males, some possible extraneous variables need to be considered in drawing such a conclusion.

Does gender affect people's perceptions of a person's chances of succeeding? Are males and females perceived to have the same or equal chances of achieving? Or, are men expected to succeed more often than women, or vice-versa?

Background and Review of Related Studies

The problem of measuring perception of future success achievement based on an individual's gender has been the subject of a number of scientific researches. Original studies on achievement motivation by McClelland and his associates (1953) reported that females did not respond as males did by increasing their achievement imagery when they were supposedly aroused by treatment conditions which emphasized leadership and intelligence. Instead, the achievement scores of female subjects tended to be higher in neutral rather than the "stimulating" experimental conditions. Unable to understand the contradictory results obtained from female respondents, McClelland ignored sex differentiation in studying the motive to achieve success. Similarly, inspite of a voluminous eight hundred pages of investigation into the causes of achievement-oriented activities, Atkinson (1958) devoted only one footnote to women.

To understand the puzzling results obtained by McClelland and others, Horner (1968) proposed the concept of "fear of success" (FOS) or "motive to avoid success" (M – s) to account for the observed female behaviors. She explained that women have "... a disposition to become anxious about achieving success because they expect negative consequences (such as social rejection and or feelings of being unfeminine) as a result of succeeding." (Horner, 1972 p. 171). According to her theory, females have a compounded anxiety compared with males in competitive situations involving intellectual competence and leadership potentials because they do not only experience fear of failure but also a fear of success. Women's motive to avoid success is based on the belief that femininity and achievement are "two desirable but mutually exclusive ends."

In a partial experimental test of her hypothesis, Horner asked 178 undergraduates made up of 88 males and 90 females to complete the version of this sentence appropriate to their sex: "After first term finals, John (Anne) finds himself (herself) at the top of his (her) medical school class." Her results revealed that 65 percent (59/90) of the women and less than 10 percent (8/88) of the men wrote stories about Anne or John that contained fear of success imagery. There was a significant difference between the way female subjects envisioned Anne and the way male subjects pictured John. John was portrayed in a highly positive manner while Anne was generally imaged as being unhappy,

unpopular, ugly and abnormal. While rosy pictures were predicted for John, fears of social rejection and confusion about the definition of womanliness were projected on Anne. Some females ignored the possibility that a woman could place at the top of her class, others attributed her success to luck, and some suggested that Anne become a nurse instead.

Horner's pioneering study provoked several investigations of the concept of FOS in males and females. Horner and Rhoem (1968) surveyed various female samples of their FOS and obtained the following results: for seventh graders (9/19 or 47%); for eleventh graders (9/15 or 60%); for college undergraduates (22/27 or 81%); and, for secretaries (13/15 or 86.6%). Schwenn (1970) found FOS in 12 of 16 female juniors (or 75%). All these girls had grade point averages of B or better. Those with a tendency to M – s preferred to keep their successes unknown to their male peers, desiring instead to have their failures made public. Schwenn focused on two factors which could have most probably stirred the women's FOS namely, the attitudes of their parents and male peers toward appropriate sex role behavior.

Watson (1970) studied female summer school students among whom 24 out of 37 (or 65%) manifested FOS. A significant relationship was also found between FOS and drug-taking of marijuana, LSD, and speed by respondents. Those who frequently indulged themselves in drugs had a greater tendency to write FOS imagery. Horner speculated on the psychodynamic implication of this observed correlation. She noted how society punishes women who want to achieve by making them feel like misfits.

The strong intuitive appeal of Horner's hypothesis gained further support from the publication of popular books on the ambivalent consequences of achievement for successful women. Dowling (1981) theorized about women's secret fear of independence in "The Cinderella Complex" and struck a sensitive chord among the public turning her book into a best-seller. Clance (1985) described the "impostor phenomenon" to characterize the bewildering sense of fraudulence which taint the achieving female's experience of success. A similar theme was developed by Hardesty and Jacobs (1986) in their book on *Success and Betrayal: The Crisis of Women in Corporate America.*

In the clinic, the fear of success has been observed as a common issue in the achievement conflicts of women (Person 1982; Krueger 1984; and Moulton 1986). Recognition of the phenomenon has spawned many forms of psychotherapeutic interventions such as books, audio tapes, and counselling seminars designed to cope with FOS like those of Friedman (1980, 1985).

Prescott (1971) found highly significant differences in the FOS imagery of male and female college freshmen where 47% of the 36 men and 88% of the 34 women evidenced M – s. There was an interesting difference in the content of negative ideas associated with success. Females worried about the impact of their success and their feminine identity while males expressed existential concerns about finding "non-materialistic happiness and satisfaction in life."

Symonds' (1973) exploration showed 90% of female college students experienced success anxiety, particularly when they were about to complete a course of study and earn a degree. Such anxiety was nowhere present in male college students who instead were grappling with another problem—fear of failure. Spence (1974) likewise observed the female FOS and found that most of his male subjects could not positively accept the idea of a successful woman.

On the other hand, a number of studies challenged the notion that females have a fear of success. For example, Morgan and Mausner (1973) revealed that women fear solitary success in male dominated fields and activities. When these women were asked to imagine sharing their success in a male dominated field with other women, they responded positively. Also, they did not fear success in female dominated fields like teaching children and nursery.

Hoffman (1974) replicated Horner's experiment but found that males showed more fear of success than females, 77% to 65%. Like Prescott's earlier findings, Hoffman found the running theme of the men with FOS to be a general questioning of the importance of success or a devaluation of the target goal, while women were consistently anxious about social rejection. Pleck as cited by Tresemer (1974) further attest to the presence of FOS also in males particularly those who are threatened by female competence. Tresemer also opined that while Horner's concept of FOS is popular, it remains unproven.

The inconsistent results of studies on M – s or FOS continue to baffle its investigators leading one researcher (Alper 1974) to refer to it as the "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't phenomenon."

The present experiment intends to re-examine the relationship between perceived gender and the drive for success. Are the results of Horner's experiment and the other affirming subsequent Western researches valid in the Philippine setting? When asked to visualize a success story, do Filipino college students usually think of a male or a female?

Following the trend initiated by Horner, it is hypothesized that success drives are dependent on the perceived gender of an individual.

Method

A. Subjects .

Thirty-six students from an undergraduate psychology class were randomly selected to participate in the experiment. They were randomly assigned to two experimental groups, matched by sex. Thus each group was composed of 18 subjects among whom were six males and 12 females. Their ages ranged from 17 to 21 years. A majority of the subjects were communication arts majors while the rest were into business and economics.

B. Materials

Writing materials such as a piece of paper and a writing instrument were used by the subjects to participate in the study. The main material used consisted of one topic sentence with which the subjects were to start and elaborate on for a story-writing activity. The topic sentence for the first group had, "Ana Ramires graduated valedictorian of her Ateneo de Manila class," while the second group had, "Antonio Gatmaitan graduated valedictorian of his Ateneo de Manila class."

C. Procedure

Each subject was instructed to create a futuristic story of at least ten statements for the character (either Ana or Antonio) assigned to them. Emphasis was given on foretelling the future. After 30 minutes, the subjects were asked to determine whether each of the sentences in their stories had a positive, negative or neutral effect in the character's life depending on whether the given sentence was a progress statement. regress statement or a neutral statement, respectively. To determine the dependent variable, the percentage of positive sentences in the subjects' stories was computed using the following formula:

$$\%\ of\ positive\ statements = \frac{no.\ of\ positive\ statements}{total\ no.\ of\ statements} \times 100$$

Results

The empirical data showed that Group I with the character Ana had a greater average of positive statements for every composition (mean = 60.77) than Group II with the character Antonio which received an average of 42.49 success-oriented stories. The difference between the two means produced a t of 2.326, significant at $p<.05$.

Discussion

The obtained results confirm the effect of perceived gender on a person's drive for success as given in the review of past studies. But unlike the findings of Horner, this experiment indicated a significantly higher drive for success attributed to the female compared to the male. Among a total of 18 pairs, 13wrote a more positive future for the female character Ana compared to stories written for the male character Antonio. Ana was

perceived to have greater thrusts for achieving success than Antonio.

The idea that male and female drive to success are quite different has been around for a long time. Very often, this assumption was tied up with sex roles and social stereotypes with greater success associated with, achieved by, and predicted for males (Broverman et al. 1970; Horner, 1972; and Gaeddert, 1985). Prejudice against female achievement has also been reported by Pheterson et al (1971). These results however, may have stemmed from an externally-based definition of success as arbitrarily determined by experimenters based on dominantly male standards and measured according to public observation.

When more subjective standards were use to define success, Jackson et al. (1987) found that gender did not affect level of success. Their male and female subjects were asked to define success, successful experiences, failure experiences and neutral experiences.Under this condition, where success is determined by self-imposed objectives decided by one's attitudes, the level of success for males and females were considered equal.

From three experiments on penalties for sex-role reversals, Costrich et al. (1975) demonstrated how the males in their studies were given no more leeway to deviate from their stereotyped roles than were the females. They argued,therefore, that males will also experience FOS if they competed with the opposite sex in areas where others of their same sex have rarely encroached upon such as being the best nurse or homemaker. This "sex-role inappropriateness hypothesis" was also upheld by Morgan and Mausner (1973), and further substantiated by Cherry and Deaux (1978), Janda et al. (1978) and Feather and Simon (1978).

Still the cultural expectation that males attain a higher level of achievement than females persist. The traditional view of men as breadwinners and women as housekeepers, respectively is still adhered to in the decade of the 1980s even by the women. For example, Sleeper et al. (1987) studied the performance on anagrams and expectations concerning performance of 52 males and 52 female undergraduates. The investigator focused on the effects of gender of subject and partner. The experimenters found two significant findings: first, women in general rated themselves much lower than the men did; and, second, both sexes expected to perform better when paired with males. The findings somehow imply that females are not very success-oriented, but they feel that their chance of succeeding in a given task would be boosted when they are ably assisted by a man. Men, too were seen as intellectually superior even as research has shown that there are intellectual differences in the way the two sexes solve problems: on the average, women do better in certain verbal skills and men in spatial and mathematical skills.

However, these ideas have been challenged by the women's movement along with the undeniable steady influx of females in ordinarily male-dominated areas. Lunneborg and Rosenwood (1972) concluded from their studies that sex stereotypes were slowly changing, and even gradually diminishing in the college population because men were becoming more concerned with interpersonal relations and women with pride in school and work. Wish and Hosozi (1973) discovered through testing that most males would see others as having an intermediate probability of success. These men could accept that women have fifty-fifty chances of succeeding just like them.

Beans and Kidder (1982) found that female medical students were both more help and achievement oriented than were males. From their "children and kitchen" days, women today have managed to occupy positions of utmost importance—presidents, prime ministers, business executives and surgeons. In fact, in some societies, such as Scandinavia, men are the ones who take care of the house while women go out to work. This has been labeled as the "house husband phenomenon."

During the post experimental interview, the subjects in this study, noted how well-exposed they were to the successful female role models in the Philippines and abroad. The subjects reported awareness of women who made it to the top, including some of their own mothers, friends, schoolmates and relatives.

The female subjects were observed by the experimenter to be more expressive of their opinions, more articulate, ambitious and with a strong sense of self-esteem compared to the male sample. Canavan-Gumpert (1978) analyzed success-fearing personalities as externals, highly anxious in testing conditions related to academic matters and possessing negative self-esteem.

Some of the subjects pointed to the fact that the study was conducted among thirty-six educated youths so that the traditional attitude toward women may have had little influence over the subjects' own attitudes toward women, thus giving women more positive opportunities and turns of events.

Other participants explained the obtained results as probably a function of their writing style. According to these subjects, they responded to the experimental task not so much with their view of success but with the wish to show their writing abilities. For example, some asserted that success stories are much too boring considering their tastes are already vitiated by the plethora of success stories available. Hence, their tendency to write the opposite—the tragic. Still others claim, they wrote nonchalantly for pure undisturbed fun.

Although the observed t was significant, there were some extraneous variables that could have affected the study. First, twenty-six of the subjects were females, an evident majority compared to only ten males. Then, there were the subject's style of writing (tragic or victorious), mood (happy or sad), and perspective toward life (optimistic or pessimistic). Present events, too, could have affected their plot (ex. recent death in the family, promotion of the mother, etc.).

It might also be interesting to study other relevant variables aside from gender in determining an individual's drive for success. For instance, Paludi (1984) suggested such qualifying factors as level of success, occupation in which success was achieved (as earlier hypothesized by the sex-role inappropriateness theorists), and more cultural rather than intrapsychic factors as also pointed out by George (1986).

Considering all the above, perhaps a more situational rather than individual determinant could better explain the FOS phenomenon as also recommended by Cherry and Deaux (1978) and O'Connell and Perez (1982). Lastly, the present experiment can be used as added data in gauging perceptions of changing gender roles in society, and increasing understanding of the achievement motive of men and women. Particularly for the Philippines, which is a less industrialized country, it is interesting that the study found that the FOS can be present to a greater degree among males than females. Further studies to shed light on this observation would be most welcome.

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