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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to assess female and male counselor sex-role stereotyping in their perceptions of the appropriateness of female and male students' occupational choices. The following variables were controlled in a six-way analysis of variance: sex of counselor, sex of student, occupational status, occupational stereotype, ability of student, and interest of student. No overt sex stereotyping was found. There were significant differences between the female and male counselors, female and male occupational stereotypes, high and low status occupations, high and low interests. Fifteen of the 57 interactions were significant. Scheffe post hoc comparisons were computed, and it was determined that counselors viewed the interest level of the student as the most important variable in rating the appropriateness of the occupational choice. (Author)

Does Counselor Response to Occupational Choice Indicate Sex Stereotyping?

by

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*This paper is based on the data from the master's thesis of Ms. Hendrix.

DOES COUNSELOR RESPONSE TO OCCUPATIONAL CHOICE

INDICATE SEX STEREOTYPING?

With the advent of Feminism in this country, many people are beginning to question the feminine and the masculine roles which are deeply ingrained in our society. Currently there is a general movement demanding that people regardless of race, religion, or sex be allowed to develop to their fullest capacities without societal role limitations. Our educational systems are being forced to examine their sex-stereotyping of individuals in the areas of administration, counseling, curriculum, instruction, and materials. Counselors are being asked to consider their own sex biases and the effect of these biases on the counseling process.

The results of several studies have shown that counselors do reflect a sexist bias in their counseling. A study by Pietrofesa and Schlossberg (1970) indicate counselor bias against women entering a masculine occupation. Thomas and Stewart (1971) found that secondary school counselors rated females with atypical career goals more in need of counseling than females with traditional career goals. According to Hawley (1971) much of the existing career theory does not apply to women, and counseling for girls is often based on borrowed theory or stereotypes. Persons (1972) found a significant difference in bias between female and male counselor trainees; the males displayed more bias than the females. Bingham and House (1973) indicate that the results of a survey they conducted show many secondary school counselors are working with misinformation and negative attitudes about women and the world of work. Abramowitz et al. (1975) report that counselors rated female students who violated sex roles as more maladjusted.

However, not all studies have indicated counselor bias. Schuck (1974) studied the attitudes of guidance counselors toward the entrance of women

into the medical profession and found that the sex of the applicant was not a significant variable. Oliver (1975) reported some research which indicated that women who view themselves in nontraditional ways are psychologically healthier than their more traditional sisters. High school counselors did not rate females and males differently in terms of the appropriateness of the decisions they made concerning selection of courses for the coming year; instead they differentiated on the basis of information given (Price & Borgers, 1976).

In the past ten years research has focused on discrimination against women. The limitations imposed on men by sex-stereotyping are just beginning to be recognized, and little research has been done in order to identify the type or degree of male vocational sex-stereotyping which may be occurring. One of the questions asked in a study by Elton and Rose (1970) is why is it that men who express interest in areas which are typically more female often view themselves as less adequate when rated on a traditionally masculine scale.

Since the literature in the area of counselor bias is neither comprehensive nor conclusive, the purpose of this study was to investigate sex-stereotyping in the area of career counseling. More specifically the question was, "When rating the appropriateness of occupational choice based on hypothetical ACT aptitude scores and Kuder C interest scores, will high school counselors rate females and males differently?"

Method

Subjects. The sample in this study is eight female and eight male counselors from three high schools in a medium-sized city in the Midwest. This school system has three high schools and employs sixteen counselors; all participated in the study. The counselors have master's degrees and meet state

certification requirements. There was no significant difference between female and male counselors in the number of years of counseling experience.

Data Analysis. A six-way analysis of variance with a completely crossed and balanced design was used to analyze the data. Variation in the analysis could result from the following sources: sex of rater, sex of ratee, occupational stereotype, occupational status, ability level, and interest level.

Procedure. Each counselor was given sixteen protocols and an instruction sheet. The protocols were the primary tool used in assessing counselor vocational sex stereotyping. These protocols were used to rate the students on the appropriateness of their occupational choice and were the means by which the study controlled for the six independent variables: sex of the rater, sex of the ratee, occupational stereotype, occupational status, ability level, and interest level. The proctocol contained the age of the student, the sex of the student, the grade level, the ACT aptitude test (1970) scores, the Kuder C (1951) interest scores, the chosen occupation of the student, and a five-point rating scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). On this scale counselors were asked to rate the appropriateness of the occupational choice using only the data available on the protocol. This rating was the dependent variable in the study. The counselors were not aware that sex stereotyping was the major variable nor were they aware that the protocol sheets were based on hypothetical students.

The ACT was chosen for the aptitude test for several reasons. It gives a profile which is read easily and can be shown in percentiles and is normed on college-bound high school students. It breaks the score into four basic subject areas with a composite score. A percentile score of 70% or higher was

defined as high ability, and a percentile score of 30% or lower was defined as low ability. Also the counselors were familiar with the ACT.

The Kuder Preference Record, Form C was chosen because the separate scores for females and males could be expressed in combined percentiles, thus eliminating the tendency to interpret a score differently depending on the sex of the student. The profile is easily read and understood, and all counselors were acquainted with the Kuder scales. A score of 85% or higher defined high interest, and a score of 17% or lower defined low interest.

Each protocol listed one of the following as the chosen occupation: barber, licensed practical nurse, psychiatrist, auctioneer, typist, certified public accountant, executive secretary, electrician, mechanical engineer, zoo-keeper, dental assistant, nursing administrator, attorney, professor of Family and Child Development, seamstress, or interior designer. A brief description of how these occupations were selected is given here, and a complete description may be obtained by writing to one of the authors.

For the protocol, occupations were classified as either high status or low status; this classification was based on Roe (1956). Classification of the occupations into either female or male categories was done by choosing professions which are predominantly filled by either females or males. In order to correlate interest with the occupations, The Occupations Finder (Holland, 1970) was used, and Holland's six categories were matched to eight of the categories on the Kuder Personal Preference Record, Form C.

For each of the independent variables, there were two levels: male and female raters, male and female ratees, high and low occupational stereotypes, high and low occupational status, high and low ability, and high and low interest. The six main effects of the study were ordered in the order of

importance: sex of the rater, sex of the ratee, occupational stereotype, occupational status, ability level, and interest level.

The sixteen occupations with their succeeding breakdowns were repeated for female and male ratees rated by female and male raters. There was a total of 64 different protocol combinations, with each protocol rated four times. This made a total of 256 protocols. In order to assure that each of the 16 counselors got protocols with 16 different occupational choices without repeating occupations, a system of random assignment of protocol sheets was used for each occupational choice. Each counselor rated sixteen different protocols. The counselors all had equal numbers of female and male profiles, female and male occupations, high and low ability levels, and high and low interest levels.

Results

Means and standard deviations for each of the 64 cells based on the dependent variable were computed. The means were computed for each cell for rater sex, ratee sex, occupational stereotype, occupational status, ability level, and interest level. By comparing the group means within the independent variables, the variables which proved to be statistically significant could be studied.

Female counselors reported a significantly ($p \leq .003$) lower mean rating (2.66) than male counselors (3.00) on the protocols for all ratees. The mean rating between female (2.89) and male (2.79) ratees was not significantly ($p \leq .389$) different. Female occupational stereotypes (3.03) were rated significantly ($p \leq .001$) higher than male occupational stereotypes (2.65). High status occupations (2.70) were rated significantly ($p \leq .021$) lower than low status occupations (3.00). High ability level (2.94) was not rated

significantly ($p \leq .098$) higher than low ability level (2.74). Interest level reported the most significant ($p \leq .0001$) of the six main effects, with high interest level (3.48) receiving a much higher rating than low interest level (2.20).

All possible interaction effects were tested, and 15 of the 57 interaction effects were significant at the .05 level. Where significant differences were found, Scheffe post hoc comparisons were computed (Scheffe = .9295) to determine where the differences were. Most of the significant interactions were present because of a significance in direction rather than a significance in degree.

For the four significant two-way interactions the following relationships were found. High status occupations (2.70) were rated lower than low status occupations (3.00) with high ability (2.94) rated higher than low ability (2.74) with an inverse relationship between occupational status and ability ($p \leq .0001$). There was an inverse relationship ($p \leq .007$) between female occupational stereotype (3.03), male occupational stereotype (2.65), and high interest (3.48) and low interest (2.20). High occupational status (2.70) was rated lower ($p \leq .002$) than low occupational status (3.00) whereas high interest (3.48) was rated higher than low interest (2.20). The last significant two-way interaction was between ability and interest level ($p \leq .001$) with high ability rated .21 higher than low ability and high interest rated 1.28 higher than low interest. From these results a student's interest in an occupation was a greater importance in the counselor's judgment than was the student's ability, the status of the occupation, and the occupational stereotype. Also, the inverse relationship between occupational status and ability is interesting since the high status occupations in this study generally

require more ability than the low status occupations. Perhaps this difference occurred because the counselors did not discriminate on ability level and appropriateness of occupational selection.

For both the three and four-way significant interactions, the only significant difference was in the area of interest. Interest was the major contributor in the counselors' ratings of the appropriateness of occupations selected when compared to the variable of rater sex, ratee sex, occupational status, occupational stereotype and ability level.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school counselors exhibit vocational female/male sex role stereotyping of high school students in traditional occupational fields. No overt sex bias was found. This finding deserves discussion since it suggests that counselors make judgments on the basis of information given rather than on the sex of the student. It may also indicate that counselors have become more aware of sex bias and are making efforts to avoid sex stereotyping since the findings of many previous research studies indicate discrimination on the basis of sex.

It may be that sex-role stereotyping occurs, but at a more subtle level since much of the sex discrimination in our society is at a subtle rather than an overt level. Counselors rated the female occupations as more appropriate for all ratees than the male occupations; this may mean that male occupations are viewed by counselors as being more difficult and having higher status than female occupations.

Several of the interactions of the independent variables could also be interpreted as subtle sex-role stereotyping. The mean rating on stereotypically female occupations interacted directly with the mean ratings on high ability and high interest, and the mean rating on stereotypically male

occupations interacted directly with the mean ratings on low ability and low interest; a possible reason for this is that in stereotypically female occupations, students would be seen as needing higher ability and interest levels in order to be successful in their careers. The interaction of female ratees, female occupational stereotypes, low status, and high interest may suggest that the more appropriate careers for females are the stereotypically female careers which have appropriately lower status but require higher interest levels in order to succeed. There was also a significant interaction among female occupational stereotype, low occupational status, and high ability; one possible conclusion from this is that the stereotypically female occupations tend to be lower in status level, but in order to succeed, an individual must have a higher ability level than the individual who pursues a stereotypically male occupation which is higher in status level. Finally, the interaction of female ratees, low status occupations, high ability level, and high interest level may suggest that the lower status occupations are more appropriate for women, but in order to succeed, higher ability and interest levels than those for men may be required.

Another finding of interest is the difference in the ratings of the high and low interest levels. This suggests that interest scores were much more important to the counselor than the other variables when rating the appropriateness of occupational choice. Since there is less stability of interest for high school students, this raises the issue of whether interest scores should be given so much consideration by counselors when they have other information available.

The last finding indicates that there was a difference between the ratings of female and male counselors. The females gave significantly lower ratings than the males. One reason for this may be that the females are less optimistic in their views of what others can achieve at this point in our social development. From their experiences they may have learned that in order to achieve a career goal, a lot of effort and determination was required and, therefore, may be conservative in their expectations for all students.

This study has yielded some information about high school counselors and sex-role stereotyping of high school students in traditional occupational fields. It also raises some questions: Is there sex stereotyping at a subtle level? If there is sex stereotyping, how does it affect males? What factors influence counselors when they do vocational counseling? Are female counselors more conservative in their expectations than male counselors? Until these questions are answered, it is important that counselors carefully consider their attitudes and the effect of these attitudes on their counseling since they need to be sensitive to any force which may limit or hinder the development of individual potential.

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