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ABSTRACT

To explore the nature of the success which fear-of-success-women avoid and that to which they aspire, a study elicited essays on subjects' definitions of personal success. Instrumental career striving was examined by requesting self-reports on subjects' preferred career, reasons for career choice, current activities toward eventual career attainment, and post-graduation plans. The subjects were thirty-five female introductory psychology students. Five were black, one was Oriental. About three-quarters were first year. Five were majoring in the social sciences, eleven in traditional liberal arts, the rest were from various undergraduate professional schools. Four TAT slides were used to elicit imaginative stories. Subjects also responded to open-ended questions. Results indicated priority of personal success definitions was, in descending order, personal satisfaction, people, effects and job, and family life. Common reasons for career preference were helping people, loving people, and liking and interest. Education and career-related work were the most frequently mentioned career-directed actions. Most subjects planned career-preparatory work or graduate education. The motive to avoid success was negatively related to (1) femininity; (2) priority given to personal satisfaction, jobs, family life, and people in general; and (3) career choice because of liking for and interest in field. (YLB)

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## Fear of Success, Sex Roles, and Personal Success Goals

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There is considerable ambiguity in the current research literature on fear of success regarding the relationship between the motive to avoid success and traditional femininity. Many investigators have expected fear of success to be associated with traditional femininity or female sex-role behavior, and the absence of such findings has been interpreted as a failing for the measure and its theoretical foundations (Tresemer, 1977; Zuckerman & Wheeler, 1975). The definitions of femininity used have not always been theoretically clear or consistent, and this fact may account in part for the conflicting results.

Spence & Helmreich (1978) have differentiated sex role concepts into several components, three of which are applied here. Femininity as an internal individual characteristic is a facet of the person's self-concept, incorporating such personality dispositions as nurturance, emotional expressiveness, and interpersonal sensitivity. The overt behavioral expression of femininity is feminine role-taking, also called role adoption by Lynn (1969). Female sex-role expectations are cultural norms prescribing appropriate behavior for females, and these norms are enforced by positive and negative sanctions. The understanding of the relationship between fear of success and femininity

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requires the specification of ways in which these components interact in producing behavior.

Perhaps because the original formulation of the motive to avoid success framed it in sex-role terms, this motive has frequently been disembedded from its place in the McClelland-Atkinson tradition and viewed as a direct, trait-like predictor of a stereotypically feminine self-concept and behavior. But this relationship is probably neither direct nor simple. Horner's (1972, 1978) formulations of fear of success have not strongly emphasized the distinctions above, and yet a close reading of Horner (1978, p. 49) produces two discriminable references to the constructs in question. Fear of success is "acquired early in life in conjunction with sex-role standards"; that is, it represents an internalization of cultural negative sanctions for behavior inappropriate to the female role, and is thus the tendency to expect "negative consequences such as social rejection following success" in proscribed situations. Secondly, the motive to avoid success is a tendency to feel uncomfortable with "behavior . . . inconsistent with one's femininity, an internal standard". There are two different but compatible interpretations of this description. First, it suggests that the security of one's self-concept can be threatened by the behavioral violation of internalized cultural standards. Alternatively, one's self-concept can be threatened by one's behavior inconsistent with that self-concept, such that feminine sex-typed persons may be threatened by masculine sex-typed behavior (and masculine sex-typed persons by feminine sex-typed behavior). However, this last interpretation does not suggest that feminine sex-typed persons should necessarily be higher in fear of success, but simply that a feminine self-concept is behaviorally congruent with internalized cultural standards of female sex-role behavior.

In response to the disorder in the empirical literature, Horner (1978) made an explicit dissociation between the motive to avoid success and sex-role orientation. She noted that nevertheless there may be indirect relationships, since individuals with a non-traditional sex-role orientation may tend to seek situations which violate traditional sex-role prescriptions, thus risking the negative consequences mandated for such behavior by cultural norms. Since these persons are more likely than sex-role traditional persons to be subject to negative sanctions, their (realistic) expectation of negative consequences constitutes the arousal of the motive to avoid success, which may then adversely affect performance.

Thus, there are at least three ways in which sex-role related constructs pertain to fear of success: 1) Cross-sex role-taking, being more subject to negative consequences than traditional role behavior, may tend to arouse the motive to avoid success, so that performance in sex-inappropriate situations is inhibited by expectation of the negative consequences associated with success; 2) One form of negative consequence may be a threat to the self-concept, particularly the loss of self-esteem related to one's success as a member of one's sex if one behaves like a successful member of the opposite sex; and 3) Social rejection as a negative consequence may be mediated by the affiliative component of dispositional femininity. According to this analysis, a negative relationship between the motive to avoid success and self-concept femininity would be expected, since it is likely that the women who are most vulnerable to fear of success are those who already feel they are not succeeding as women. This may be particularly true for those whose low self-reported femininity stems from uncertainty about their interpersonal skills and sensitivity. Already lacking in sex-role self-esteem, low

feminine women may thus be doubly vulnerable to fear of success arousal if they are reporting accurately that they lack the social skills to compensate for expected affiliative loss following sex-inappropriate success.

Researchers have tended to expect positive relationships between femininity and the motive to avoid success, and have been puzzled by findings indicating that low fear of success women actually report feeling more feminine than high fear of success women (e.g., Makosky, 1976).

The three sex-role constructs discussed here are assumed to interact in complex ways. The primary outcome variable of interest here, role-taking behavior, is assumed to be determined by both dispositional sex-typing and internalized cultural sanctions (fear of success). Where dispositional sex-typing leads to culturally favored behavior, as in feminine sex-typed women (Bem, 1976), the absence of negative consequences for success should result in unconflicted action. However, when dispositional sex-role self-concept or situational pressure lead toward cross-sex role-taking, the motive to avoid success should be aroused. Theoretically, this should have two kinds of consequences: ambivalence, reflected in performance decrements in the cross-sex role, anxiety, and/or inconsistent behavior toward the goal; and compensatory role behavior, specifically behavior providing proof of femininity and/or insurance against social rejection.

Fleming (1977) has suggested that the behavioral impact of the motive to avoid success differs for sex-role traditional and non-traditional women. The former may respond to fear of success arousal by flight from achievement (functional debilitation), while the latter may seek achievement in spite of their apprehension, and suffer ambivalence and anxiety as a result of approach-avoidance conflict arousal. When given female competitive success

cues, non-traditional-success seeking women students produced fewer success-avoidant responses (O'Leary & Hammack, 1975), but among an older, less homogeneous sample, fear of success was higher among non-traditional women (Caballero, Giles, & Shaver, 1975), a discrepancy clearly interpretable as reflecting different responses at different distances from the conflicted goal. Among college students, goal distance and favorable female-achievement norms should markedly reduce arousal of the motive to avoid success, and thus success-avoidant responses, for non-traditional intellectually striving women--but this reflects a measurement issue rather than one of behavior prediction.

Fleming (1977, 1979) has discussed the role of ambivalence about instrumental activity in the revised scoring system for the motive to avoid success (Horner & Fleming, 1977). Such a behavioral ambivalence is displayed by Stewart's (1975) high fear of success women, who at age 31 tended not to be working, but wishing for a career; they also reported doing nothing when faced with life crises.

Hoffman's (1977) high fear of success women who became pregnant tended to do so at crucial moments in a sequence of achievement strivings, evidence that one achievement-avoidance strategy is engagement in "conflicting" activities which confirm femininity. Stewart's (1975) data support a similar observation. Among subjects who had proof of femininity (early marriage and children), fear of success did not predict flight from achievement; among never-married women, fear of success predicted such flight. In general, high fear of success women married and had children earlier than their low fear of success peers. Anderson (1978) cites the goal of "modest professional dedication to a sex-appropriate career" as a compromise response to achievement conflict.

To explore the nature of the "success" which fear of success women avoid, and that to which they aspire, the present study elicited essays on subjects' definitions of personal success. Instrumental career striving was examined by requesting self-reports of subjects' preferred career, reasons for career choice, current activities toward eventual career attainment, and plans for the year after college graduation.

The following general hypotheses were tested:

1) That feminine sex-typed women would suffer the least functional debilitation and ambivalence from fear of success, since they are expected to restrict themselves to feminine sex-typed personal success goals appropriate to both their self-concept and the female role. The motive to avoid success is not expected to be a significant predictor of behavior for this group.

2) That masculine sex-typed women high in fear of success would experience restricted priorities in a wider range of behavior domains. To the extent that their self-concept directs them to culturally proscribed goals, they may reasonably expect negative consequences for success. To the extent that fear of success measures a general tendency to avoid sex-role inappropriate behavior (Fleming, 1979), their rejection of feminine-qualities and behavior may prevent them from seeking proof of femininity as a compensation, since the "internal standard" of their self-concept sex role is masculinity, not femininity. Thus, the negative consequence associated with loss of sex-role self-esteem for them would be the loss of confidence in their masculinity. In addition, their self-reported rejection of feminine interpersonal skills may make social rejection a particular threat following success, and compensatory social goals in this domain are expected.

3) That androgynous women high in fear of success would suffer the greatest ambivalence regarding instrumental activities.

inconsistent attitudes, feelings, and behaviors toward career goals. Since they are less apt to restrict their choices of situations and behaviors to fit a restrictive sex role (Bem, 1976), their sex-role self-concept should be less subject to threat from their own behavior. Nevertheless, since they have internalized the cultural sanctions against competitive achievement for women, they should pursue occupational success somewhat erratically. Since they rate themselves as secure in their femininity, and thus probably able to avert social rejection, they should have less need for compensatory female role-taking behavior.

4) That undifferentiated women (low in both femininity and masculinity), being more inhibited and lower in self-esteem than androgynous women, would respond to fear of success by leaving the achievement arena to the greatest extent possible, perhaps without even engaging in compensatory behavior to bolster their lack of self-esteem as women.

#### Method

##### Subjects

The subjects were 35 female Introductory Psychology students, who participated as part of a course requirement (data from 35 males, collected simultaneously, are not reported here). All signed informed consent forms and were debriefed after the testing session. Most of the subjects were white; five women were black, and one was Oriental. About three-quarters were first-year. Only five subjects were majoring in the social sciences; eleven women listed a traditional liberal arts major and the rest were from a variety of undergraduate professional schools within the University. Mean age was eighteen years.



## Measures

Four TAT slides were used to elicit imaginative stories under standard neutral instructions in a mixed-sex testing condition with a male and a female experimenter. In order, the slides were: two men in a drafting scene, the Women Chemists, a teacher with two young boys at a blackboard, and a man catching a woman on a flying trapeze. Stories were scored for the motive to avoid success according to Horner & Fleming (1977) by a scorer who had previously attained a reliability of .90 with expert-scored practice materials. Because of a significant correlation between fear of success scores and story length ( $r = .33$ ), all analyses were computed using fear of success scores corrected for verbal fluency according to Winter (1973).

Personal success definitions were coded from subjects' essays in response to a two-part request: first, to describe the specific things that a successful life would contain for them personally; and secondly, to list these things in order of their importance, specifying why they were important. An exhaustive coding system was developed (independent of other variables) which captured the major categories occurring "naturally" in the data and assigned a priority score from one to four to each categorizable response. Most of the aspects of success cited by most subjects could be grouped under four major classes of goals: People, Materialism, Personal Satisfaction, and Job. Each goal class contained several subcategories to allow more refined analysis. For example, People included Family Life, Children (a subdivision of Family Life), Friends, and People in General (e.g., "to be liked by people", "to contribute to humanity"). Materialism included references to basic financial security as well as money for luxuries and to share with others. Personal Satisfaction, a broad collection of references to affects, personal

growth, and enriching and educational activities, had two major subcategories, Affects and Self-Development. Job included all references to a future occupation. All protocols were blind-scored by two raters, and disagreements resolved by discussion and consensus. Interrater category-priority agreement for subcategories was .89.

Subjects responded to open-ended questions regarding the career they "would like", their reasons for choosing that career, their current activities toward career attainment, and their post-graduation plans. Preferred careers were scored for sex-typing according to the percentage of women so employed at the 1970 census. Reasons for career choice, activities toward career attainment, and post-graduation plans were each scored according to an exhaustive coding system developed independently for this purpose, as for the personal success definitions. Interrater category agreement was .93. Major categories of reasons for career choice were Helping People, Loving People, Materialism, Liking and Interest, Role Modeling, and Past Experiences. These were scored for presence or absence in the protocols. Actions toward career attainment included Education, Career-Related Work (paid or volunteer), Extracurricular Activities (and other relevant informal experience), and Hard Work (any exertion, such as "studying hard"). Actions were scored 2 if already undertaken, 1 if planned, and 0 if not mentioned. Post-graduation plans were primarily categorizable as Working (at non-career related jobs), Career-Preparatory Work, Graduate Education, and Marriage. Plans were scored for simple presence or absence.

Probability of career attainment and probability of following post-graduation plans were rated on 7 point Likert scales.

Sex-typing and androgyny were measured by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory,

The theoretical picture of the motive to avoid success suggests that not all careers stimulate avoidance equally. As students describe their future jobs, the most approachable careers should be feminine sex-typed, should be low in priority among personal success goals and rated low in probability of attainment, should be chosen out of "love for people" rather than out of liking and interest, and should not involve hard work in preparation. To differentiate careers according to their avoidance-arousing potential, an index of "job safety" was created which summed the standard scores of most of these variables, with positive or negative weights as noted (career sex-typing was excluded because of its high correlations with the Bem scales).

### Results

The mean uncorrected motive to avoid success score was 1.7, with scores ranging from 0 to 8. As previously noted, the correlation between motive scores and story length required a correction for the number of words in the story protocols, and all further analyses used the corrected score.

Of the personal success definitions, Personal Satisfaction was given the highest priority, with a mean of 2.9 of a possible 4. In descending order, People averaged 2.8, Affects and Job both averaged 2.1, Family Life was ranked at 1.9, People in General at 1.3, Self-Development at 1.2, and Materialism at 1.1. Priorities did not differ significantly by Bem quadrant.

The mean job sex-typing index was 34 (%female). The most common reasons for career preference were Helping People, Loving People, and Liking and Interest. Education and Career-Related Work were the most frequently mentioned career-directed actions. Most subjects planned either Career-Preparatory Work or Graduate Education in the year after college.

To evaluate the theoretical assertion that the motive to avoid success should be negatively related to femininity, correlations between fear of success and each of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory scales were examined. Fear of success was negatively correlated with Femininity ( $r = -.39, p < .01^*$ ), but uncorrelated with Masculinity ( $r = .12, p = ns$ ). The four BSRI groups did not differ significantly in fear of success ( $F(3,31) = .57, p = ns$ ). In an attempt to differentiate self-concept femininity and masculinity from the broader spectrum of stereotypically feminine and masculine dispositions and behaviors included in the BSRI, correlations were also performed between fear of success and the single BSRI items, "feminine" and "masculine". Overall, ratings of "feminine" were negatively related to fear of success ( $r = -.39, p < .01$ ), but ratings of "masculine" were unrelated ( $r = .10, p = ns$ ). For feminine women, however, there were significant correlations for both items ("feminine"  $r = -.56, p < .025$ ; "masculine"  $r = .68, p < .005$ ). Among undifferentiated women "masculine" was strikingly related to fear of success ( $r = -.96, p < .005$ ). For masculine sex-typed and androgynous women these relationships were not significant.

Among the personal success definitions, overall correlations indicated that the motive to avoid success was significantly related to the priority given to Personal Satisfaction ( $r = .33, p < .05$ ), Job ( $r = -.30, p < .05$ ), Family Life ( $r = -.34, p < .025$ ) and People in General ( $r = .39, p < .025$ ), as summarized in Table 1. Fear of success was also negatively related to choosing the career because of liking for and interest in the field ( $r = -.31, p < .05$ ), and positively associated with plans to marry in the year after graduation ( $r = .36, p < .025$ ). In addition, high fear of success subjects were less

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\* All probabilities reported are for a one-tailed test.

confident of their post-graduation plans ( $r = -.43, p < .005$ ), but no less certain of attaining their preferred career ( $r = -.08, p = ns$ ).

Job sex-typing was unrelated to the motive to avoid success in every analysis conducted. However, feminine sex-typed women chose careers which were significantly more feminine sex-typed (mean % female=70) than did the other three groups (range=25 for masculine to 38 for androgynous).

The "job safety" index was correlated positively with the motive to avoid success for all subjects ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ); the association was strongest for androgynous ( $r = .68, p < .05$ ) and masculine groups ( $r = .63, p < .05$ ).

When the sample was subdivided according to BSRI quadrants, group differences emerged in the correlates of fear of success. Family Life was only modestly associated with fear of success for feminine sex-typed women ( $r = .19, p = ns$ ), but for masculine sex-typed women, low fear of success was associated with priority given to Family Life ( $r = -.71, p < .025$ ). The difference between the correlations for masculine and feminine groups was significant ( $z = 1.99, p < .025$ ). Children as a specific priority were also significantly more valued by high than low fear of success feminine women ( $r = .60, p < .025$ ), the only significant personal success relationship for this group; but among androgynous women the ranking of children was associated with low fear of success ( $r = -.49, p = ns$ ; difference  $z = 2.26, p < .01$ ). It was high fear of success masculine women who valued People in General most highly ( $r = .86, p < .005$ ).

The general category of Personal Satisfaction was most strongly related to the motive to avoid success for androgynous women ( $r = .67, p < .05$ ). When partitioned into its subcategories of Affects and Self-Development, though overall correlations with fear of success were not significant, distinctive

differences between androgynous and undifferentiated subjects emerged. The satisfaction sought by androgynous high fear of success women appears to be in the more active and instrumental category of Self-Development ( $r = .73, p < .025$ ), an achievement avoided by undifferentiated women ( $r = -.76, p = ns$ ; difference  $z = 2.3, p < .01$ ). Success for undifferentiated high fear of success women was clearly located in the area of Affect ( $r = .98, p < .001$ ). The strongest relationship between fear of success and career priority was among masculine sex-typed women ( $r = -.50, p = ns$ ).

Regarding reasons for career preference, among androgynous women fear of success was strongly negatively associated with citing Liking and Interest ( $r = -.82, p < .025$ , but for feminine women Liking and Interest was unrelated to fear of success ( $r = -.04, p = ns$ ; difference  $z = 2.07, p < .02$ ).

While the initial analysis showed no significant relationships between the motive to avoid success and any of the actions toward career attainment, when the sample was divided strong correlations appeared for androgynous women between fear of success and both Career-Related Work ( $r = .77, p < .025$ ) and Extracurricular Activities ( $r = .68, p < .05$ ). Only androgynous women mentioned the latter activities.

The relationship between fear of success and plans to marry after graduation was due to the masculine ( $r = .70, p < .05$ ) and feminine ( $r = .52, p < .05$ ) groups. No androgynous or undifferentiated women mentioned such plans.

#### Discussion

The theoretically anticipated relationship between the motive to avoid success and general BSRI Femininity was empirically supported, as was the expectation that high fear of success women would describe themselves specifically as less feminine than would low fear of success women. It

appears that feminine sex-typing according to the BSRI does not prevent a high fear of success woman from feeling insecure in her explicitly self-rated "femininity", since she reports feeling not only less "feminine" but also more "masculine" than her low fear of success feminine sex-typed sister. This unexpected finding helps to explain the observation that, though in general the motive to avoid success has no impact on the feminine sex-typed woman's definition of her personal success, she nevertheless seeks proof of her femininity by giving children a high priority in her life and by planning to marry in the year after her college graduation. She instrumentally avoids fear of success arousing situations by restricting her career aspirations to "safe" traditionally female careers, and this restriction appears to allow her to pursue her occupational goals without ambivalence.

The theoretical relationship between fear of success and various forms of sex-typed role-taking behavior for other groups was also substantiated. For masculine sex-typed women, fear of success does not seem related to lack of confidence in their explicitly self-rated "masculinity" or (nota bene) their "femininity", suggesting that their success goal behavior is due to their internalization of cultural sanctions rather than to insecurity about their success at being women. High fear of success masculine sex-typed women show a mild behavioral ambivalence toward their careers by giving the latter a (nonsignificantly) lower priority, even though they have chosen relatively "safe", less avoidance arousing nontraditional careers. This choice may explain the lack of inhibitions in their career pursuit; according to theory, traditionally male careers should be avoidance arousing.

The major area of conflict for masculine sex-typed high fear of success women is the affiliative domain. They seem to have struck an effective

compromise between culturally demanded female role behavior and their masculine self-concepts and career choices. They plan to marry soon after graduation (thus obtaining proof of their success as women), but this proof is not seen as important in their future success, as shown by the low priority given to Family Life. In addition, they have chosen an interesting antidote for fear of social rejection following their culturally sanctioned pursuit of traditionally male occupations. Rather than giving high priority to family or friendships, they turn to a generalized other for their social success, by seeking "to be liked by people", "to help people", or "to serve humanity". This undifferentiated form of social relationship probably demands less interpersonal competence than close relationships with individual family members or friends. To the extent that this group's low Femininity Scale scores represent low ratings on affiliative items, this may be an adaptive goal-setting strategy.

Androgynous high fear of success women seek personal development as a priority. The career picture for them, though similar to that of the masculine group, indicates greater ambivalence. The androgynes do not give a higher priority to their careers, and they tend strongly not to choose careers out of Liking and Interest; however, they are strikingly active in career pursuit. These instrumental actions may be explained by their choice of "safe" careers which are not high priority, are motivated by Loving People rather than Liking and Interest, for which they are not now "working hard", and which they may not attain anyway. Thus, like their masculine counterparts, however instrumental their pursuit of traditionally male careers, they deny that pursuit is terribly serious.

The undifferentiated high fear of success women give the highest priority to feelings of happiness and love, clearly representing an internal locus



of success. Beyond that, their priorities and behavior do not appear to be related to the motive to avoid success.

These data reflect the aspirations for still distant goals of a sample of primarily first-year students, and may be assumed to be idealistic. Schwenn (1970) has found that college women tend to become more traditional in their career aspirations with time, especially if they are high in fear of success. Thus, a retest of these subjects as college seniors might reveal a relationship between job sex-typing and fear of success. Also, subjects were asked what career they would like, not what career they expected to achieve or were capable of achieving, and responses to those questions might be differently related to fear of success.

These data provide distinctive portraits of the different impact of fear of success on women differing in their sex-role orientation. Clearly the use of relevant theoretical material can improve our understanding of fear of success, of femininity, and of their combined effects on success goals and behavior.

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Table 1.

Correlations with Motive to Avoid Success

Subjects	Family Life	Children	People in General	Personal Satis.	Affects	Self-Development	Job	Liking & Interest	S. S. /"
All subjects	-.34**	-.08	.39**	.33*	.15	.17	-.30*	-.31*	.49***
Feminine	.19	.60**	.22	.30	.26	.04	-.00	-.04	.41
Masculine	-.71**	-.20	.86***	.44	-.00	.55	-.50	-.43	.63*
Androgynous	-.49	-.49	.31	.67*	-.26	.73**	-.35	-.82***	.68*
Undifferentiated	-.29	.00	.13	-.23	.98***	-.76	-.19	-.36	.34

\* p .05 one-tailed

\*\* p .025 one-tailed

\*\*\* p .01 one-tailed