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ABSTRACT

Sex differences in the career plans of 601 men and women completing graduate training in the male-dominated professions of business, law, and medicine and the female-dominated professions of education, nursing, and social work were studied. Content analysis was performed to determine the continuity, specificity, ambition, and accommodation of family responsibilities reflected in plans for 2-, 5-, 10-, and 20-year points. Chi square analyses showed clear patterns of sex differences in the feminine professions. For example, most women in education and social work expressed less ambitious plans for management careers and career success than their male colleagues. Except for child care, the plans of women in male-dominated groups were not significantly different from those of male colleagues. (Many women projected combining child care and careers at the five- and ten-year points, but no males mentioned this possibility.) It was suggested that more role models should be made visible to both men and women, rather than the stereotypically narrow choices now available. (Author/KC)

Career Plans of Men and Women in Gender Dominant Professions

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Abstract

This research investigated sex differences in the career plans of 601 men and women completing graduate training in the male-dominated professions of business, law, and medicine, and the female-dominated professions of education, nursing, and social work. Content analysis was performed to determine the continuity, specificity, ambition, and accomodation of family responsibilities reflected in plans for 2-, 5-, 10- and 20-year points. Chi square analyses showed clear patterns of sex differences in the feminine professions. Except for child care, the plans of women in male-dominated groups were not significantly different from those of male colleagues. The findings are discussed from the perspective of role theory.

Career Plans of Men and Women in Gender-Dominant Professions

The purpose of this paper is to compare the career plans of men and women in three male-dominated and in three traditionally feminine professions. Sex differences are examined with respect to the commitment, specificity, ambition, and accommodation of family responsibilities reflected in the plans projected for points 2, 5, 10, and 20 years in the future. The findings are discussed from the perspective of role theory to examine alternative hypotheses for observed differences including acceptance of sex role stereotypes, strain from role overload, enrichment from multiple roles, and the ascription of differential value to competing roles. Educational interventions for more informed career choices are also considered.

Review of Related Literature

The underrepresentation of women in many prestigious occupations has been well documented. Even after the enactment of legislation and creation of affirmative action programs, entry and advancement for women in high-paying, male-dominated professions has been limited. Many researchers have examined overt and subtle factors in women's external environment which may account for limited career advancement for women. These include: discouragement from family members (Goodale & Hall, 1976) and from counselors (Arhons, 1976; Schein, 1971; Weisman et al., 1976); denial of entry into more prestigious and challenging specialities within a profession (Jacobs, 1972); lower starting salaries (Terborg & Ilgen, 1974); fewer opportunities to participate in management training (Rosen & Jerdee, 1974); exclusion from social networks that provide contacts with colleagues and clients (Pfeiffer, 1975); fewer invitations to

present papers, write chapters, and serve on editorial boards (Yokopenic et al., 1974; Kashket et al., 1974; Epstein, 1979; Dinerman, 1971); and rejection of successful women by male and female colleagues (Hagen & Kahn, 1974; Miller et al., 1974).

Barnett (1975) noted that external barriers eventually become internalized, and many researchers have questioned whether internal attitudinal barriers which exist in the minds of the women themselves might cause females to prefer less prestigious occupations or more limited advancement in male-dominated occupations, so they do not have to compete with men. Substantial evidence exists that sex-typing of behavior is pervasive and is established at an early age. Furthermore, the acceptance of stereotyped sex-role limits career choices to cultural definitions of sex-appropriate occupations (Bardwick, 1971; Kohlberg, 1966; McCandless, 1969; Mischel, 1970; Mussen, 1969).

Studies of women who enter atypical, male-dominated fields are of recent vintage. In 1977, Ashburn noted that "the number of women choosing and maintaining a career in a male-dominated profession may have been so small that it has not been possible to determine any common pattern of motivation" (p. 11). No relevant research was found published before the 1960's. Empirical literature focusing on the employment of women in male-dominated professions began to appear with some frequency in the late 1960's and early 1970's, but only broad categories or forced dichotomies were used to designate criterion groups such as "pioneer" women versus "housewives," or women in "nontraditional" versus "traditional" fields (Nagely, 1971; Patrick, 1973; Rand, 1968; Rossi, 1965). Oftentimes subjects were college students or adolescents classified on the basis of expressed rather than actual career choice. The value of such studies must be questioned because the predictive validity of career orienta-

tion has not been established (Harmon, 1967, 1970).

Now that researchers have been able to obtain sufficiently large samples of women actually pursuing male-dominated professions, evidence is beginning to mount that differences among careers for the variables studied are greater than differences between the sexes within careers (Mandelbaum, 1981; Shann, 1979; Wertheim, Widom, Wortzel, 1978; Wood & Greenfield, 1976). Occupationally atypical women look more like their male colleagues than "traditional" women on traits which "appear to be adaptive to their professional life styles and expectations" (Bachtold, 1976, p. 78).

If professional women in male-dominated fields do share job-relevant characteristics with men in those fields, what factors might account for their slower progress within those professions? Why do women experience slower advancement even in the fields they dominate numerically? To investigate this question, the career plans of men and women in three male-dominated professions and three traditionally feminine fields were content-analyzed for evidence of continuity, specificity, and ambition. If aspirations limit achievement, it is important to know that women form less clear, less ambitious plans than men. Accumulated evidence from the research literature and methodological cautions about prior studies indicate that appropriate comparisons should be made between women and men at the same level of advancement in occupational pursuits, and between groups of women in traditionally male and historically feminine fields who are equally educated (Lemkau, 1977).

It was predicted that women in male-dominated fields would reflect similar levels of specificity and ambition in their career plans as do men in those fields. Women in feminine fields would express less ambitious plans than their male colleagues in terms of leadership and administration. Women in fe-

minine fields supposedly compatible with motherhood would express plans to interrupt work for child care or combine part-time work with child care than women in male-dominated fields. Finally, it was predicted that few if any men in masculine or feminine fields would express plans to accommodate child care in the projection of career plans over the short or long term, despite the dramatic increase in dual career families and mothers of preschoolers in the labor force (Bureau of the Census, 1978).

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 341 male and 260 female graduate students enrolled in core courses of professional degree programs at four universities in the Greater Boston area during 1975-1976. Self-administering test kits were distributed at the beginning or end of regularly scheduled class periods. Return rates ranged from 75% to 100%.

Subjects were classified into one of six groups according to field of study. Three were male-dominated fields: business, law, and medicine. Three were traditionally feminine pursuits: education, nursing, and social work. Distributions of males and females in each group in the sample reflected the pattern of enrollments by sex in those professional programs in the universities and are consistent with figures reported for graduate degrees conferred on men and women nationally for the academic year 1976-1977 (Bureau of the Census, 1978).

Procedures

As part of a larger study of correlates of career choice (Shann, 1979), subjects were asked to respond to the open-ended question: "Although no one can predict the future with certainty, state briefly what you expect to be

doing in 2 years, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years." Six-inch, double spaced lines were provided for responses to each time interval.

The author trained two assistants to analyze the content of the responses. Plans at each time point were rated for evidence of commitment to one's profession , specificity, ambition, and accommodation of family and child care responsibilities. Specific descriptions were given to the raters for each rating category. Commitment to one's profession was operationally defined as plans to work in one's field of professional training. Descriptions of the rating categories for specificity ambition, and accommodation of marriage and family responsibilities are shown in the headings of Tables 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Practice sessions for raters were used until 90% agreement was achieved. In the formal coding, raters conferred when they were not confident what assignments should be made.

Analysis

The SPSS Crosstabs program was used to perform chi square analyses of the categorical data. Sex differences were tested in each variable for five occupational groups. Furthermore, the tests were performed for each variable at each of four time points. Special cautions were applied in the analysis of sex differences in the business group with only 11% female subjects. No analysis of sex differences could be performed for the nursing group with only 2% males. Since so many tests were performed, the probability of Type I error was a serious consideration. Patterns of differences in the analyses were examined in light of directional hypotheses expressed earlier.

Results

Commitment

There were no significant sex differences in the commitment reported for any of the time intervals by any of the career groups. Commitment to one's field of professional training was shown for upwards of 94% of all career groups at the time 2 years from data collection. At the 5-year mark, the percentages giving plans to work in the same field varied only a few points from the 2-year figures for all groups except social work. In the latter group, less than 82% expressed plans for employment in social work, while 12% gave plans to work in other fields. The 10- and 20-year plans reflected a general decline in percentages intending to work in their field of professional training to levels ranging from 67% for education to 81% for business and social work. The notable exception was the medical group, in which more than 95% continued to express plans to work in medicine at 2-, 5-, 10-, as well as 20-year time points.

Specificity

Men and women were equally specific in reporting their career plans at the 2-, 10- and 20- year marks, in all six career groups. However, as shown by the significant chi squares and distributions of responses in Table 1, women in the feminine professions of education and social work were significantly less clear than their male colleagues about their plans five years from the time of data collection, a point when Census data suggest that many of them would begin bearing and rearing children. The trend for women in nursing was similar, but with only two male nurses in the subsample, statistical significance of sex differences could not be tested. There were no significant sex

differences in specificity at the 5-year mark for the male-dominated professional groups.

Ambition

Regarding the level of ambition reflected in the career plans, the data shown in Table 2 reveal a clear pattern for women in education to express less ambitious plans for leadership than men in education; the chi squares for sex differences in the variable of ambition for the education group were statistically significant at the 2-, 5-, 10-, and 20-year marks. Chi square analyses reported in Table 2 also show that women in social work expressed significantly less ambitious plans for leadership than their male colleagues at the 5-, 10-, and 20-year marks. The data for women in nursing show a pattern of less ambitious plans, but again, sex differences could not be tested in this almost exclusively female profession. Less clear but noteworthy is the trend for women in the business group to express less ambitious plans for management positions in five years ($\chi^2=6.79$, df=3, $p < .07$) than the men in that group. The chi square for sex differences in ambition reflected in 20-year plans for the business group was statistically significant at p .04. No significant sex differences in level of ambition were found for the law and medical groups.

Accommodation of Marriage and Family Responsibilities

Analysis of sex differences in the accomodation of marriage and family responsibilities in career plans are reported in Table 3. Results are given only for 5-year and 10-year plans, because there was virtually no mention of marriage or family responsibilities in the plans for men or women at the 2-year and 20-year marks. Not surprisingly the points at which women became less specific and/or less ambitious in their expressions of career plans correspond with the points at which they are significantly more likely than their

male colleagues to express consideration of plans to accommodate marriage, family, and child care responsibilities, oftentimes in combination with part-time employment. At the 5-year mark, women in the business group and women in the feminine professional groups expressed plans to combine work and child care with significantly greater frequency than the men in those groups. At the 10-year point, this significant difference is also true for women in medicine, after a longer period of professional establishment before child bearing than women in any group but law. Very few of the women in law and virtually none of the men in any group mentioned plans for marriage, or child care, in reporting their plans over the 20-year period. It is especially noteworthy that very few women in any of the career groups plan to interrupt their careers to rear children. Instead they wish to combine work and child care if they plan to assume the responsibilities of children at all.

Discussion

This research contributes to the growing body of evidence that career field and traditionality of choice may be more important than the factor of sex in distinguishing among patterns of career development. Now that it is possible to design studies including sufficiently large numbers of women actually pursuing male-dominated professions, increasingly researchers are reporting that occupationally atypical women look more like their male colleagues than "traditional" women on traits which appear to make them adaptive to the performance requirements of their profession (e.g., Bachtold, 1976; Bartol, 1976; Morrison & Sebald, 1974; Orcutt & Walsh, 1979; Wertheim et al., 1978; Wolfe & Betz, 1981). The present study extends that finding from the attitudinal, personality, aptitude, achievement and demographic variables examined by previous researchers to characteristics of the career plans expressed by professional men and women in the present study.

Subjects of this study were men and women completing programs of graduate study in six professional areas. The subjects were asked to report what they expected to be doing 2, 5, 10, and 20 years in the future. Content analysis of the unstructured, open-ended responses yielded ratings on each of the following characteristics: commitment to field of professional training; specificity; ambition; and accommodation of marriage and family responsibilities. These four features of the plans at each time point were investigated using chi square analyses of sex differences within each career field. With few exceptions, the plans of women pursuing professional training in the male-dominated fields of business, law, and medicine were not significantly different from those of their male colleagues. Significant differences in the accommodation of marriage and family responsibilities were the significant exception to this pattern. Especially for the 10-year mark, women in the male-dominated business and medical groups were more likely to project plans combining employment and child care, while virtually none of their male colleagues expressed plans to accommodate child care.

Markedly different results were obtained for men and women in the traditionally feminine fields. There were clear patterns of statistically significant sex differences in the ambition reflected in their career plans at all time points for the education group and in the 5-, 10-, and 20-year projections for the social work group. Sex differences in ambition of plans for the nursing group could not be tested statistically, but the same trend of differences were in the direction of males' expressing more ambitious plans for positions of leadership. Additionally, the women in education and social work offered less specific plans than males in these fields for 5 years in the future, a point when these women were also significantly more likely than their

male colleagues to express plans to accommodate marriage and family responsibilities.

Several limitations to the present study should be noted. First, gender dominance continues to be very pronounced nationally in the professional fields of business management and nursing, and these subgroups in the present study reflect those imbalances. The examination of sex differences in groups with 11% females (business) or 2% males (nursing) is tenuous at best. Second, the reports of career plans were given in response to an unstructured question to minimize cueing in soliciting plans. However, this approach required content analysis of responses, a cumbersome technique particularly subject to rater unreliability or systematic rater bias, although coding procedures were designed to minimize these factors. Then, the resulting scores were only nominal level measures. This limitation of the data required the use of multiple chi square tests, increasing the probability of Type I error. Moreover, it was deemed inappropriate to compare the plans for career group differences directly, since professional contexts differ, and what is regarded as ambitious in one profession may not be so regarded in another field. Thus only sex differences within career group were tested directly. Despite these limitations, the patterns of significant sex differences were found as predicted and no unexpected results were obtained.

Perspectives from role theory seem useful for interpreting sex differences in career plans. The findings suggest that women in non-traditional professional fields reject culturally-defined sex roles and develop some of the same behaviors beneficial to males in masculine fields. Other researchers corroborate this explanation. Wolfe and Betz (1981) found that women who reject stereotyped sex roles and pursue non-traditional occupational roles which

have been considered more appropriate for and primarily pursued by men are more likely to describe themselves in terms of stereotypically masculine characteristics. Their research supported Holland's postulate of congruence between occupational choice and personality orientation for masculine-typed women in non-traditional fields, but not for feminine-typed women choosing traditionally feminine career fields. Terborg also cited evidence that women's rejection of sex role stereotypes is an important factor in their pursuing non-traditional careers. Once in those positions, non-traditional women have needs, motives, and values that are similar to men who also are in those positions (Terborg, 1977). In a previous report on subjects of the present study, it was shown that women choosing non-traditional fields reported significantly more non-traditional attitudes towards women's roles in society than women in the feminine professions (Shann, 1979). Evidence from the present study also suggests that career aspirations for men and women in male-dominated career fields are not significantly different.

Having rejected stereotyped sex roles, the non-traditional women may experience reduced conflict between the self-perception of their roles and the roles expected of them in their professional lives. If the women in male-dominated fields advance more slowly than men in these professions, it may be a function of role overload more than role conflict. Women in business and medicine were significantly more likely than males in their fields to express plans to combine work and child care. While the roles of career woman and mother are not necessarily incompatible, it is difficult to allocate sufficient time and energy to all of the multiple role demands.

Acceptance of sex role stereotypes and compliance with powerful and pervasive socialization processes are explanations offered by many researchers to

account for sex differences in career development, and particularly for the slower advancement of women in female-dominated careers. Women have been socialized not to compete with men. Certainly, this explanation is also reasonable for the present study. However, a theory of role accumulation proposed by Sieber (1974) offers some additional insights as well.

Seiber disputes the widely held assumption that multiplicity of roles produces a strong tendency toward role strain as a consequence of role overload. In career paths which allow role accumulation, women may experience net gratification from the combination of role privileges, overall status security, enrichment, and ego gratification. Women in feminine career fields may be choosing to pursue slower advancement, in less lucrative, less prestigious fields, because they feel that that choice enables them to accommodate and accumulate several roles in their life plans (Shann, Casey, Alexander, Goodman, 1980). The "choice" may also be less deliberate, but gratifying in retrospect. Particularly for understanding the plans and aspirations of traditional women, a new definition of success should be considered, one which is not rooted in the "male" values of competition and power.

Educational interventions and counseling for women and men should include more direct and specific consideration of work and life options for the future of women and men in the professions. Clearly the influence of same-sex models is very important, but women's vicarious learning experiences for successful professional accomplishments are limited by limited numbers. There are still too few women models of competence in non-traditional occupational areas, and there are many possible strategies to consider for women in traditional and non-traditional fields to combine employment and child care. New opportunities in child care are emerging, however slowly, and some males are assuming

substantial redefinition and sharing of roles. The notion of "models" who followed a particular route may be helpful, but only as much as new situations are considered and changing circumstances are explored, too. The availability of options is essential to career planning and decision making. Choice without alternatives is a contradiction in terms.

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TABLE 1

Sex Differences in the Specificity of Career Plans

Career Group	Distribution of Responses in Percents: Plans Not Given or Not Specific	Plans Include What or Where	Plans Include What and Where	N M/F	Chi Square
2-Year Plans					
Business	15.6	59.4	5.5	115/13	N.S.
Law	9.3	79.4	11.3	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	1.0	62.5	36.5	68/28	N.S.
Education	5.0	51.3	43.7	51/68	N.S.
Social Work	9.8	57.3	32.9	28/54	N.S.
Nursing	12.7	43.0	43.0	2/77	*
5-Year Plans					
Business	15.6	50.8	33.0	115/13	N.S.
Law	10.3	73.2	16.5	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	0.0	72.9	27.1	68/28	N.S.
Education-M	3.9	37.3	4.2	51	6.18
Education-F	10.3	52.9	36.3	68	df=2 $p < .05$
Social Work-M	7.1	46.4	46.4	28	7.46
Social Work-F	24.1	55.6	46.4	54	df=2 $p < .02$
Nursing-M	0.0	0.0	100.0	2	*
Nursing-F	20.8	42.9	33.8	77	
10-Year Plans					
Business	14.8	53.1	32.1	115/13	N.S.
Law	15.5	68.0	16.5	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	2.1	58.3	39.5	68/28	N.S.
Education	18.5	42.0	39.5	51/68	N.S.
Social Work	20.7	50.0	29.3	28/54	N.S.
Nursing	21.5	45.6	32.9	2/77	*
20-Year Plans					
Business	19.5	51.6	28.9	115/13	N.S.
Law	21.6	63.9	14.4	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	3.1	58.3	38.5	68/28	N.S.
Education	30.3	37.0	32.8	51/68	N.S.
Social Work	17.1	57.3	25.6	28/54	N.S.
Nursing	31.6	39.2	29.1	2/77	*

* Chi squares were not computed for sex differences in the nursing career group due to the small n for males.

TABLE 2

Sex Differences in the Ambition Reflected in Career Plans

Career Group	Distribution of Responses in Percents: Plans Not Given	Ambition Unclear	Ambitious/ Scholarship	Ambitious/ Leadership	N M/F	Chi Square
2-Year Plans						
Business	10.9	21.9	7.8	59.4	115/13	N.S.
Law	5.2	12.4	71.1	11.3	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	1.0	0.0	83.3	15.6	68/28	N.S.
Education-M	3.9	11.8	35.3	49.0	51	8.23
Education-F	4.4	30.9	36.8	27.9	68	df=3 $p < .04$
Social Work	6.1	41.5	15.9	36.6	28/54	N.S.
Nursing-M	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	2	N.S.
Nursing-F	5.2	29.9	28.6	36.4	77	*
5-Year Plans						
Business	10.2	24.2	3.9	61.7	115/13	N.S.
Law	8.2	48.5	4.1	39.2	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	0.0	14.6	3.1	82.3	62/28	N.S.
Education-M	3.9	13.7	27.5	54.9	51	9.91
Education-F	10.3	27.9	32.4	29.4	68	df=3 $p < .03$
Social Work-M	7.1	32.1	10.7	50.0	28	8.41
Social Work-F	22.2	46.3	1.9	29.6	54	df=3 $p < .04$
Nursing-M	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	2	N.S.
Nursing-F	14.3	26.0	28.6	31.2	77	*
10-Year Plans						
Business	10.9	25.8	3.1	60.2	115/13	N.S.
Law	12.4	45.5	2.1	40.2	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	2.1	44.8	32.9	22.8	62/28	N.S.
Education-M	11.8	11.8	19.6	56.9	51	10.9
Education-F	17.6	27.9	26.5	27.9	68	df=3 $p < .01$
Social Work-M	17.9	25.0	7.1	50.0	28	7.9
Social Work-F	22.2	46.3	0.0	31.5	54	df=3 $p < .04$
Nursing-M	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	2	N.S.
Nursing-F	14.3	31.2	32.5	22.1	77	*

TABLE 2--Continued

Career Group	Distribution of Responses in Percents: Plans Not Given	Ambition Unclear	Ambitious/ Scholarship	Ambitious/ Leadership	N M/F	Chi Square
			20-Year Plans			
Business-M	18.3	20.9	4.3	56.5	115	8.59
Business-F	0.0	53.8	7.7	38.5	13	df=3 $p < .04$
Law	17.5	44.3	2.1	36.1	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	3.1	47.9	1.0	47.9	68/28	N.S.
Education-M	19.6	15.7	19.6	45.1	51	11.08
Education-F	23.5	38.2	17.6	20.6	68	df=3 $p < .01$
Social Work-M	25.0	25.0	3.6	46.4	28	8.12
Social Work-F	11.1	57.4	1.9	29.6	54	df=3 $p < .04$
Nursing-M	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	2	*
Nursing-F	23.4	29.9	28.6	18.2	77	

* Chi squares were not computed for sex differences in the nursing career group due to the small n for males.

TABLE 3

Sex Differences in the Accommodation of Marriage and Family Responsibilities in Career Plans

Career Group	Distribution of Responses in Percents: Plans Not Given/Unclear	Consideration of Marriage in Plans	Interruption of Career for Bearing/Rearing Children	Combination of Work and Child Care	N M/F	Chi Square
5-Year Plans						
Business-M	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	115	27.07
Business-F	69.2	0.0	0.0	30.8	13	df=1 $p < .0001$
Law	95.9	1.0	0.0	3.1	77/20	N.S.
Medicine	96.9	1.0	0.0	2.1	68/28	N.S.
Education-M	98.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	51	9.36
Education-F	85.3	2.9	0.0	11.8	68	df=3 $p < .03$
Social Work-M	96.4	3.6	0.0	0.0	28	16.85
Social Work-F	53.7	3.7	3.7	38.9	54	df=3 $p < .001$
Nursing-M	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2	*
Nursing-F	66.2	1.3	2.6	26.0	77	
10-Year Plans						
Business-M	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	115	27.07
Business-F	69.2	0.0	0.0	30.8	13	df=1 $p < .0001$
Law	94.8	0.0	0.0	5.2	77/20	N.S.
Medicine-M	98.5	0.0	0.0	1.5	68	27.07
Medicine-F	78.6	7.1	0.0	14.3	28	df=2 $p < .01$
ducation-M	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	51	10.03
ducation-F	82.4	2.9	1.5	13.2	68	df=3 $p < .02$
cial Work-M	92.4	7.1	0.0	0.0	28	16.51
cial Work-F	63.0	0.0	1.9	35.2	54	df=3 $p < .001$
sing-M	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2	*
sing-F	68.8	3.9	3.9	23.4	77	

hi squares were not computed for the sex differences in the nursing career group due
) the small n for males.